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THE BATTLE OF AACHEN

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Fort Leavenworth, Kansas

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20. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number) During September 1944 the first US Army made the deepest penetration of the "West Wall" in the vicinity of AACHEN. German intent was to prevent further penetration into Germany by Allied forces. US forces encircled the town of AACHEN and repulsed German counterattacks. House-to-house fighting ensued with heavy use of artillery against entrenched enemy positions. This battle is an excellent example of military operations in built-up/urban terrain.		

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TYPE OPERATION: Offensive, Deliberate Attack, MOUT

OPPOSING FORCES: US-VII Corps:

3d Inf Div  
1st Inf Div  
2d Armd Div

German Forces:

1st SS Pz Gr Regt of 1st SS Pz Div  
506 Hvy TK Bn  
304 Pz Gn Regt of 2 Pz Div  
246 Inf Div  
3d Pz Gn Div

SYNOPSIS:

The First US Army made the deepest penetration into the West Wall in the vicinity Aachen, in September 1944. The German intent was to prevent further penetration into the homeland. US forces encircled the town of Aachen and turned back German counter-attacks. House-to-house fighting followed characterized by heavy use of artillery against German positions. Self-propelled 155-mm guns and tank destroyers were used extensively in the street fighting. This battle is an excellent example of military operations in urban terrain.

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# aachen



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AIX-LA-CHAPELLE  
AKEN  
AQUISGRÁN  
AQUISGRANA  
AKWIZGRANIE  
CÁCHY  
AAXEH[E]  
AAXEN  
JAHENG

## THE BATTLE OF AACHEN

Prepared by Staff Group 13c

Major (P) Robert E. Price III  
Staff Group Leader

## THE BATTLE OF AACHEN

### OFFENSIVE, DELIBERATE ATTACK, MOUT

#### U.S FORCES:

1st U.S. Army  
VII Corps:  
1st Inf Div  
3rd Inf Div  
2nd Arm Div

#### GERMAN FORCES:

3rd Pz Gn Div  
246th Inf Div  
304th Pz Gn Rgt  
506th Hvy TK Bn  
1st SS Pz Div

13 September-21 October 1944

Prepared by Staff Group C, Section 13  
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Editor

Submitted to the Combat Studies Institute, U.S. Army  
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the requirements for subcourse P651, Battle Analysis

Fort Leavenworth  
May 1984

# BATTLE OF AACHEN BATTLE ANALYSIS

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## CHAPTER 1

# Introduction To The Battle of Aachen

By no means does the outcome of battle  
depend upon numbers, but upon the united  
hearts of those who fight.

Kusuneki Masushige,

14th Century A.D.

The Battle of Aachen occurred during the period 13 September 1944 through 21 October 1944. The scene for the tactical setting is Aachen, Germany. Aachen is situated in western Germany adjacent to both the Netherlands and Belgium, collectively known as the Dutch frontier. The city was founded in the eighth century A.D. and is alleged to be the birthplace of the great German Emperor Charlemagne. Aachen was the Western culture and learning during Charlemagne's reign. In all, thirty-two German kings and emperors have been crowned in this highly revered city. (1)

As indicated on sketch map 1, the physical location is ideally suited to protect the German high northern plain that provides a high speed mobility corridor leading directly to

Cologne, the Rhine River and east to Berlin. From the north and to the west of the city run a series of razorbacked ridges which dominate the terrain. To the southeast the approaches are again guarded by ridges and hills. (2) Taking advantage of Aachen's naturally defensible terrain, Hitler's (3) defensive architects turned Aachen into a key position along the Siegfried line, thus making the city a formidable fortress. In the surrounding countryside, every border town and village was part of the defensive network, that extended east to a depth of fifteen to twenty-five kilometers. (4) Aachen was the ideal location to test the effectiveness of the Westwall or Siegfried line.

Under normal circumstances the Westwall would have been almost impossible to penetrate; however, American success in France and Belgium caused the Germans to retreat. Because of this pell-mell German retreat, General Courtney Hodges, 1st Army Commander, believed that he could reach Aachen before the Germans could man the defenses of the Siegfried line. (5) This would allow him access to a mobility corridor and thus a rapid advance to Duren, Cologne and the Rhine River. He also believed that he could do all of this in one week. (6) He might have been successful had the American/Allied logistical line been able to keep pace with the combat units, but the 1st Army ran out of fuel just short of the Siegfried Line.

As a result, the Germans had time to reinforce Aachen. The psychological edge for the Allied Forces was lost. The Americans

could no longer enter Germany relatively unopposed. Hitler, on the other hand, seized the opportunity to ensure the German people that the Westwall was in fact impenetrable. He issued orders that Aachen should be held at all costs. (7) The resulting five week battle was one of the bloodiest of the war. The German Army, in carrying out Hitler's order to hold Aachen at all costs, put up a stubborn fight. The Americans had no choice other than to reduce the city to rubble.

The principal antagonists were the Allied forces represented by the United States, and the Axis Powers represented by Nazi Germany. American forces consisted of the United States 1st Army, commanded by Lieutenant General Courtney H. Hodges; (8) V Corps, commanded by Major General Leonard Gerow, (9) with the 4th Infantry Division, 28th Infantry Division, and the 5th Armored Division; VII Corps, commanded by Major General J. Lawton Collins, (10) with the 1st Infantry Division, 9th Infantry Division, commanded by Clarence R. Huebner (11) and 3rd Armored Division. XIX Corps, commanded by Major General Charles Corlett, (12) with the 29th Infantry Division, 30th Infantry Division, 2nd Armored Division and 7th Armored division. (13)

German forces consisted of the German Seventh Army, commanded by Field Marshal Walther Model, (14) with the LXXIV Corps, LXXXI Corps, LVII Panzer Corps, 2nd SS Waffen Division, 1st SS Panzer Division, 9th SS Panzer Division, 12th SS Panzer Division, 116th Panzer Division, 246th Infantry Regiment, (15)

352nd Infantry Regiment, 404th Infantry Regiment, 689th Infantry Regiment, and 1st SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment.(16)

All source material concerning the Battle of Aachen used to prepare this study were obtained from and are on file in the Combined Arms Research Library, Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Material used in this research project are listed below:

1. Armstrong, Anne. Unconditional Surrender . New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1961.

This book was written to provide an objective analysis of the effects of unconditional surrender on German resistance, will to fight, and postwar atmosphere. The author, an American-born history major with extensive postwar travels throughout Germany, extensively researched documented events, statements of key leaders, and eyewitness accounts. She also gives source credit to numerous professors, veterans, and statesmen, and drew material from previously unpublished diaries, letters, and interviews with leading resistance members and German generals. The strength of this source is its original contribution to the effects of unconditional surrender on the leading German generals and resistance members. With a smooth and logical flow, it also provides background for the effect of political decisions upon the tactical and operational conduct of war.

2. Chaitt, Art. " View From the Other Side". Bridgehead Sentinel , Summer 1965, pp. 1-12.

This is an interview by the author with the former commander of the 116th Panzer Division. Since this Division was often engaged against the 1st Infantry Division, it provides insight into how effective that division was. The former division commander graphically portrays the chaos surrounding the preparation of the defense of Aachen, and provides insights into events leading up to the battle. Since neither he nor the 116th Panzer Division actually fought in the battle for Aachen, this reference offers little information about that operation. The main contribution this reference makes is in describing the turbulence that was present in Germany and the Army at that time. One interesting point of view presented is that, had the Allies not delayed on the outskirts of Aachen, the city could have been taken without a serious battle.

3. Chandler, Alfred D. The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower . Vol. IV: The War Years . Baltimore: the Johns Hopkins Press, 1920.

These volumes are the compilation of actual letters, notes, speech transcripts, and messages which flowed through General Eisenhower's various headquarters and commands from December 1941 forward. General Eisenhower arranged their editing and publication at the request of historians and scholars, and the final product is a cooperative effort by the Johns Hopkins University and the Center for the Study of Recent American

History. The editing staff provided an objective, unbiased publication, with little literary comment, of unclassified data provided by General Eisenhower, family members, related military and government professionals, and national archives. The five volumes of over 26,007 pages plus supplementary material contain all the operational/tactical/strategic decisions from General Eisenhowers headquarters before, during and after the Battle of Aachen.

4. CIC Operations in Aachen and Vicinity: Sep, Oct, Nov 1944 .  
1st Counterintelligence Command Detachment. 24 February 1945.

This reference is a short accumulation of data on civilian activities and prisoner of war interrogations covering the period during which the battle of Aachen was fought. It includes several figures concerning the number of civilians and prisoners processed, as well as the analysis of their feelings toward the battle, war, and the Nazi party. The information presented is very detailed and was prepared by the detachment's commander. It is therefore, a recount of all his detachments activities.

5. Crevelld, Martin Van. Fighting Power-German Military Performance, 1914-1945 . Potomac: C&L Associates, 1980.

This book was submitted to the Office of Net Assessment, Department of Defense, Washington, D.C. to document the factors that accounted for the superior fighting power of the German military in World War II. The author claims that, although the

German administrative/logistical arrangements, command techniques, and internal organization were superior to those of the U.S., its success lay mainly in its use of human resources. His emphasis on the human, intangible dimensions of combat power is a unique point of view, and he backs it up with statistics from almost 150 works, both published and unpublished, from both German and U.S. sources. The book is an excellent analysis of the military systems of the United States and Germany and on their performance prior to the Battle of Aachen.

6. Daniel, LTC Derrill M. "The Capture of Aachen." Paper prepared for the CGSC Regular Course, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 1946-1947. (Typewritten)

This paper was written in partial fulfillment of course requirements in the School of Combined Arms. It is based on LTC Daniel's personal experience and observations as the commander of the 2nd Battalion, 26th Infantry, 1st Infantry Division during the Battle of Aachen, and covers the operations of his battalion during that battle. As such, it is a most original contribution, but also used information from reference 17 and 21 below. The paper provides an indepth view of battalion-level actions in the attack of a fortified city, and its discussion of command and control of combat forces during MOUT operations is interesting. LTC Daniel's summary and lessons learned are short, accurate, and to the point, but probably incomplete from a "big picture" point of view.

7. Daniel, Derrill M. " The Capture of Aachen". Presentation given at the USMC Amphibious School, Quantico, Virginia, 1950.

Probably the most detailed and accurate account of the battle from a tactical perspective, this lecture was give by the commander of the battalion that conducted the actual assault through the city. Naturally, it concentrates on the American forces and offers invaluable information on their situation, options, decisions, and tactics. Also included is the best description found of the terrain immediately outside the city as well as of the city itself. The author draws very few conclusions; rather he has chosen to present exhaustive facts about the operation and lets the reader determine their worth.

8. Ehrman, John. Grand Strategy, Volume V . London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1956.

These volumes were compiled and written under the auspices of the British government for the United Kingdom Military Series. The author, a British citizen, presented a factual, documented history of World War II, and he provided a quite extensive bibliography, appendices, index and footnotes. He received assistance from all departments of the British and American governments, official transcripts of messages, letters, speeches, and previously unpublished accounts of events and decisions as related in personal documents from involved government officials. The volumes' greatest contribution is a clear perspective of opposing points of view of policy-makers and decision makers, and the atmosphere surrounding controversial



decisions.

9. Ehrman, John. Grand Strategy, Volume VI . London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1956.

Same as no. 8 above.

10. Fort Leavenworth, Kansas Command and General Staff College Library Archives Section. Document No. R-11236. Headquarters 1st U.S. Infantry Division APO 1 U.S. Army. "Intelligence Activities- 1 October 1944 to 31 October 1944", 1 November 1944.

This document is an original intelligence activities report written as a historical after action report, to provide an understanding of the circumstances leading up to the Battle of Aachen. Its format is a chronological accounting of the 1st Infantry Division's intelligence activities/events occurring during the month of October 1944, and it contains numerous maps and aerial photos. Also included are eight annexes, which cover such topics as the ultimatum presented to the city of Aachen (exact text), the surrender of Aachen, and photographs of the situation maps for the period 1-31 October 1944. It is a factual, firsthand, indepth intelligence account of the Battle of Aachen that was later used as a source document to explain the events of the battle.

11. Fort Leavenworth, Kansas Command and General Staff College Library Archives Section. Document No. N-16631-D. Headquarters VII Corps, Office of the Engineer APO 307 U.S. Army. "Engineer

Operations by the VII Corps in the European Theatre Vol IV  
Pursuit into Germany", 18 October 1944.

This document was written to provide detailed information on engineer operations in the ETO. The author is unknown, but it was probably written by a member of the VII Corps staff. It was written in the form of an after action report, and describes in some detail the construction and effectiveness of German pillboxes, and the methods used by U.S. forces to destroy them. It provides an excellent first hand, factual account of engineer operations and lessons learned, and includes original documentation and maps.

12. Heichler, Lucian, "Germans Opposite VII Corps in September 1944," Research Section, Office of the Chief of Military History, Washington, D.C. December 1952.

This document provides a factual accounting of the German forces participating in the Battle of Aachen. Primary sources were refugee and POW interviews and captured documents and messages. The disposition of German forces vis a vis U.S. positions is worthwhile and useful in the tactical reconstruction of the battle. This document is good source material because it is a factual and well-documented analysis.

13. Hillgruber, Andreas. Germany and the Two World Wars .  
Translated by William C. Kirby. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981.

The author, a leading authority on German politics and

political power, wrote this book in an attempt to clarify Germanys' share of responsibility in starting both World Wars I and II. A historical work, the book traces the evolution of Germanys' foreign policy from the latter part of the 19th Century through 1945. The author cites over 40 authors in his bibliography, most of whom dealt with German foreign policy, German leadership, and the rise and fall of Hitler. But he provides a new, original point of view in that he links the intentional, "official" foreign policy of Germany to a racial-ideological war against the Jews. He believes that the extermination of the Jews, who were closely associated with communism in German minds, was intentional from the start and not just an outgrowth of prejudice. Because this book provides an excellent basis for the events which led up to World war II, and because the authors' conclusions are strongly supported by his logical presentation of the facts, this book established the political setting which was indirectly responsible for the strategic situation at Aachen.

14. MacDonald, Charles B. United States Army in World War II, The European Theater of Operations, The Siegfried Line Campaign . Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1963.

This book was written for the Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army as the seventh of a series of the Official History of U.S. Army activities in the ETO. It provides a complete account of the activities of the Military Establishment during World War II. Its purpose was to

insure that the period between 11 September and 16 December 1944 was fully recognized for its full importance and not overshadowed by the whirlwind advances and more spectacular command decisions of other periods. The author made extensive use of war records, unit histories, and German sources, and received substantial assistance from soldiers who had fought the battle, university scholars, and military schools. The book references include comprehensive footnotes and bibliography, and the manuscript was reviewed by nearly every division commander and higher headquarters involved. The book focuses on the ground war and upon the tactical setting and tactical operations at Army level and below. It is readable, comprehensive, and assumably accurate. it is an excellent source document for placing the Battle of aachen in perspective, but because it does not include the same depth of information on German forces, it needs to be supplemented in order to fully research this battle.

15. McGregor, Edward W. " Operations of the 1-18th Infantry in Vicinity of Crucifix Hill, Northeast of Aachen, Germany 8-10 October 1944". Monograph presented at the Infantry Officers Advanced Course, Fort Benning, Georgia, 1950.

This document is an account of the Battle of Aachen from the author's personal observations as the operations officer of the 1-18th Infantry. He supplemented his personal knowledge and experience with historical reports, books and operations reports. His personal recollections provide a fresh point of view because they are from the battalion level. Particularly beneficial are

his firsthand accounts of weather, terrain, and morale during the battle. His discussion of command and control, movement to the line of departure, and final preparations for attack also make this book a good source document for the general situation at Aachen.

16. Neher, Kurt, "The Defense of Aachen, city of the Emperors". Translated and digested at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College from Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung , 26 October 1944. Military Review , March 1945, pp. 88-90.

This newspaper article provides a fascinating glimpse into the Nazi propaganda machine of World War II and provides a very slanted report on the conduct and outcome of the Battle of Aachen.

17. Parrish, Maj. Monte M. "City Fighting Tactics: The Battle of Aachen". Field Artillery Journal 44 (September-October 1976). pp. 25-30.

A very interesting article, this analysis of city fighting tactics is well written but does not go into substantial detail concerning events leading up to the battle of Aachen. Additionally, the author does not give proper treatment to factors impacting on the battle but external to it, such as the role of the 116th Panzer Grenadier Division. Although specific facts are presented, there were no footnotes or references included. This is the most significant weakness of this article and must be remembered when used as a reference. The author does

present some interesting conclusions regarding tactics for military operations in urban terrain. These include an excellent analysis of the decision to encircle instead of bypass, the decision to decrease the timing of the reduction, and the failure to employ a reserve properly.

18. Report of Breaching the Siegfried Line and the Capture of Aachen . Headquarters, 1st U.S. Infantry Division, APO# 1, U.S. Army, 1944.

This report was prepared by the Staff, 1st U.S. Infantry Division to recount the actions leading up to the breaching of the Siegfried Line and the ultimate reduction of the city of Aachen. It begins with a discussion of the disposition of forces in the Mons, Belgium area on 7 September. The report provides a day-by-day discussion of events leading to the capture of Aachen on 21 October.

19. Selected Intelligence Reports, Vol I, June-November 1944 .By Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2, 1st Infantry Division. 1944.

Written immediately after the period covered, this report is extremely useful for anyone interested in researching 1st Infantry Division operations. Presented in this report is detailed information on German morale, training, logistics, order of battle, command and control, and courses of action. Also included is a report on the debriefing of Col. Gerhard Wilck, commander of the Aachen defense forces. Probably of greatest importance is the detailed listing of units assigned to defend

Aachen, their origin, composition, and military readiness. Because it was prepared so soon after the period it covers, there is little integration of intelligence from other sources or comprehensive analysis. It does provide a look at what intelligence was available to the commander at the time and was therefore, very helpful in researching this operation.

20. Seydewitz, Max. Civil Life in Wartime Germany, The Story of the Homefront . New York: The Viking Press, 1945.

This book was written by a former member of the Reichstag who fled Germany in the 1930's because of political differences with Hitler and the National Socialists. It appears that the author's intent is to show the world that the majority of Germans did not fully support the policies of Hitler and were themselves victims of them. He apparently hoped to influence world opinion to be more understanding of the Germans when the time for settlement and postwar actions came about. The author wrote about events of which he had firsthand knowledge through the current speeches, newspapers, and magazine. Because of the author's personal experience and knowledge of personalities and events, this book provides a unique interpretation of the internal political scene. Because the author provides an excellent picture of German political objectives and national aims, and Hitler's use of human resources and industrial capacity, this book is highly recommended as a source document for the strategic setting for World War II, although it is partially colored by the author's "political ax-grinding".

21. Society of the First Division. Danger Forward. The Story of the First Division in World War II . Nashville: The Battery Press, Inc., 1947.

This book was written to provide a history of the 1st Infantry Division in World War II. It is a compilation of the inputs of many previous members of the 1st Division, including original transcripts of messages, unit operational files, unit historical records, and War Department Official History. No analysis is presented in this book. It is simply a factual presentation of the Battle of Aachen as documented and remembered by its participants.

22. Turabian, Kate L. A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations . 4th Ed. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1973.

A thorough guide to the conduct of research and preparation of research papers, theses, and dissertations.

23. Unit Report of Action 1-31 Oct 1944 . 1st Infantry Division. 5 November 1944.

This is the official report of artillery activities during the Battle of Aachen. It is very detailed and provides data on artillery organization for combat, rounds fired, weapons types, and missions fired. Also included is data on enemy aircraft seen, results of engagements, and employment of aerial assets. The data are provided in chronological order and are very



detailed. Very little analysis of data is included.

24. Werstein, Irving. The Battle of Aachen . New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1962.

The author accomplished his intended purpose--"to recreate a saga of indomitable American determination--and depict the horror and futility of war--". He did not go into any great detail with respect to tactics and individual unit; however, the book provides a good overview of the Battle of Aachen. In writing his book, Mr. Werstein, in addition to interviewing some of the men who served at Aachen, consulted both American and German diaries, journals, memoirs, and personal letters. He also had the official records of the First Army and 1st Infantry Division at his disposal. He acknowledges, however, that his most valuable sources were the newspapers and magazines of that period. The book does not provide any newly discovered evidence but does provide a different point of view. As a source reference for Chapter 1, the book was useful and the conclusions flowed logically from the evidence.

25. Whiting, Charles. Bloody Aachen . New York: Playboy Press Paperbacks, 1980, and Briarcliff Manor: Stein and Day, 1976.

This book was written to document the Battle of Aachen. The author was assisted by Herr Wolfgang Trues of Aachen and Dr. Konrad Simon, Editor-in-Chief of Aachen's major newspaper. His point of view is unique in that the book focuses on events that personally occurred to survivors of the battle, whose interviews

formed a large portion of the research for the book. The author recounts these facts with little interpretation or analysis, and a section entitled "Aftermath" describes the condition of the city and its inhabitants at the conclusion of the battle. As a source document, this book is of average value in providing a general overview of the battle.

26. Special Bibliography Number 59. "Combat in Built-up Areas". U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, September 1976.

This bibliography is designed to be a brief guide to further, broader research. All material are available in the Combined Arms Research Library and include: 47 reports, 10 publications, 39 periodicals, and 26 books.

#### ENDNOTES

1. Irving Werstein, The Battle of Aachen , (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1962), p. 15

2. Ibid., p. 16.

3. Adolf Hitler (1889-1945) was born in Austria, a legitimate child, and, by all accounts, lead a normal childhood. There was nothing in his early life which would give any hint of the sort of man he would become. He moved to Germany in 1913 and joined the German Army in 1914, serving as a dispatch runner. He was twice wounded and won the Iron Cross for bravery, and was discharged with the rank of Corporal. In 1919, he joined the German Workers' Party and soon discovered his seemingly natural ability for oratory. Appointed the Propaganda Officer, he was instrumental in changing the Party's name to that of the National Socialist German Workers' Party (Nationalsozialistische und Deutsche Arbeiterpartei or NSDAP) which abbreviated to Nazi Party. In 1921, Hitler took over the party leadership with the title of Fuhrer. The goal of the party was to restore the dignity of the German nation by revolution in order to save it from the Bolsheviks and Jews. By 1932, the Nazi Party was the largest

political party in Germany, holding 230 seats in the Reichstag. In 1933, he became Chancellor of the German Reich and promptly declared that the Nazis were the only political party permitted in Germany. On the 2nd of August 1934, after President Hindenburg died, Hitler abolished the office and declared himself the new total ruler, with the title of Fuhrer of Germany. Under his leadership, Nazi Germany became the most powerful nation in Europe. Hitler had visions of a thousand-year Reich and of forming a world order under his command. He was responsible for the extermination of as many as 6 million Jews and several million Slavs. His early success was doomed to failure. The might of the German Army was not enough to fight the entire world on two separate fronts concurrently. During the final days of the Third Reich, Hitler committed suicide on 30 April 1945, as a Russian force was fighting a block away from his headquarters.

4. Werstein, The Battle of Aachen , p. 17.

5. Ibid., p. 18.

6. Ibid., p. 84.

7. Ibid., p. 28.

8. General Courtney Hicks Hodges (1887-1966). At 18, Georgia-born, Hodges failed out of the U.S. Military Academy. He enlisted as a private in the U.S. Army and after three years won

a commission. After serving in the Philippines and then in Mexico, he commanded a battalion in the Meuse-Argonne Campaign of World War I, where he was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for valor. After World War I, he served at various posts, and became the Assistant Commandant of the Infantry School, being appointed Commandant in 1940. In 1942, he was appointed Commander of the X Army Corps. In 1943, he was promoted to LTG and moved to be Bradley's deputy. In 1944 he was given command of the U.S. First Army; under his command the 1st U.S. Army breached the Siegfried Line, captured Aachen and helped to encircle the Ruhr.

9. Lieutenant General Leonard Townsend Gerow (1888-1972). Moved from Chief of the War Plans Division to Commander of the 29th Infantry Division in 1942. In 1943, he was appointed as the U.S. Field Forces Commander in Europe. He then was appointed as V U.S. Corps Commander for the D-Day invasion, and was in command at Omaha Beach. He led V U.S. Corps until he was given Command of the U.S. Fifteenth Army in 1945.

10. General Joseph Lawton Collins (1896-1963). He was born in New Orleans and graduated from West Point in 1917. He was sent to Hawaii to work on the defenses of the islands after the attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941, and was appointed Commander of the 25th Infantry Division on Guadalcanal. He was sent to Europe where he was appointed Commander of VII U.S. Corps in 1944. VII Corps led the breakout from the Normandy beachhead and helped in the capture of Aachen. His Corps also participated in the Battle

of the Bulge and crossed the Rhine at Remagen. Additionally, he drove through Germany, enveloped the Ruhr, and met the Soviet XXXVI Corps on the Elbe. Following the war, he served a term as U.S. Army Chief of Staff.

11. General Clarence Ralph Huebner (1888-1972). During the early part of the war, he was in charge of training on the General Staff. He was appointed as the Commander of the 1st Infantry Division for the invasion, and subsequently participated in the breakout from the Normandy beachhead and the capture of Aachen. He was a former enlisted soldier who had an iron will, was a stern disciplinarian, and was known as a dogmatic decision maker.

12. Major General Charles H. Corlett (1889-1971). Commanded troops in the invasion of Attu in 1943, and then appointed as the Commander of the 7th Infantry Division at Kwajalein. He was transferred to Europe in time to command the U.S. XIX Corps and commanded it until after the Battle of Aachen. He was relieved at the Battle of Hurtgen Forest by General Hodges, due to friction between the two. He was remembered as an intensely serious soldier and an able tactician.

13. Werstein, The Battle of Aachen , p. 138.

14. General Field Marshal Walther Model (1891-1945). The son of a music master and a professional soldier, Model held various regimental, staff and adjutant appointments during World War I.

Following the War, as a loyal Nazi, he was appointed to head the Technical Department in the Army General Staff in 1935. Three years later he was promoted to Major General and commanded the Fourth Army Corps during the Polish invasion. During Operation Barbarosa, he Commanded the Ninth Army in an offensive drive that carried him to the gates of Moscow. In 1944, he was transferred to Army Group South and then, in just a short time, was moved to Army Group Centre. He was nicknamed "the Fuhrrer's fireman" due to his ability to troubleshoot command problems. In August 1944, he was appointed as Commander-in-Chief of the Army West. He was responsible for holding back the Allied armies at Arnhem. In April 1945 his Army Group Four was encircled in the Ruhr pocket by superior American forces. He surrendered over 300,000 German troops after holding out for eighteen days. On 21 April 1945, Model shot himself in the ruins of the Ruhr.

15. Colonel Gerhardt Wilck. The Commander of the Aachen Garrison, which was made up from remnants of the 246th Volksgrenadier Division; however this cannot be confirmed.

16. Werstein, The Battle of Aachen, p. 139.

## CHAPTER 2

# The Strategic Setting

Offensive war, that is, taking advantage of the present moment, is always imperative when the future holds out a better prospect, not for ourselves, but to our adversary.

Clausewitz: On War, 1832

This chapter reviews the strategic setting for the Battle of Aachen and provides an overview of the political, economic, religious, social, and technological factors associated with World War II, as well as their influence upon the eventual battle. At Granville on the Normandy coast, the Supreme Commander, General Dwight D. Eisenhower (1) considered the strategic situation in early September 1944 to be excellent. His armies had advanced from Falaise to Antwerp, to Namur and on to Verdun, destroying eight German divisions and liberating Paris and Brussels. Due to the rapid advances of the Allied forces, five German divisions were surrounded before they could man the Siegfried Line. On Wednesday, 5 September 1944, Eisenhower made his decision and dictated it as a memorandum to his secretary "We should advance rapidly on the Rhine by pushing through the Aachen



gap in the north and the the Metz gap in the south. The virtue of this movement is that it takes advantage of all existing lines of communication in the advance towards Germany and brings the southern forces on the Rhine at Coblenz, practically on the flank of the forces that would advance straight through Aachen. I see no reason to change this conception". (2)

The job of taking Aachen was given to General Courtney Hodges, Commander of the U.S. First Army. Because of the formidable Westwall fortifications around Aachen, Hodges, by nature cautious, would have halted for some days before the attack should be launched. He knew it would not be an easy task and his supplies were running out. However, General Joe Collins, one of his three Corps commanders, convinced him not to pause, and was authorized by General Hodges to conduct a "reconnaissance in force" on 13 September, to breach the Siegfried Line before the Germans were able to man it completely. Thus, General Collins' VII Corps, at that moment located on a 35 mile front around and beyond Aachen, became the first American unit to capture a German city. VII Corps planned the Aachen offensive to seize the commanding terrain northeast of the city and to make contact with the XIX Corps. Then, Aachen would be entered and reduced by assault operations. The 1st Division, making the corps main effort in the north, was to accomplish the envelopment and seizure of Aachen. The 3rd Armored Division in the center and the 9th Infantry Division on the Corps right were to make the limited objective attacks to the east in their respective zones. Collins

ordered his 1st Division, the "Big Red One", to penetrate the Siegfried Line east of the city and attack from the east in the hope that once surrounded, it might capitulate without direct assault. Gasoline had become critical and affected the operations, which nearly became "foot" actions. Bitter fighting took place during the period from 13 September until 10 October, when the easternmost defenses of the Siegfried Line were penetrated east of Aachen. The city was not completely surrounded on 10 October, since there was still a gap of about two miles. General Hodges ordered an ultimatum delivered to the city. This document promised complete destruction of Aachen if it was not surrendered unconditionally within 24 hours. (3) No answer was received, although the German radio said it had been rejected. By 10 October then, the stage had been set for the Battle of Aachen and the 16th Infantry Regiment, 12th Infantry Regiment and the 26th Infantry Regiment, all belonging to the 1st Infantry Division, were on that stage. However, since before the Mons period, the 26th Infantry had been fighting with only two battalions, the third having been attached to the 3rd Armored Division. By 11 October, the ultimatum had expired and one of the two remaining battalions was moved to the east of the city. It became clear that 2nd Battalion, 26th Infantry would have to do the house-to-house and pillbox fighting from the east into Aachen itself. The week before the other two regiments had taken positions to the northeast and south of the city to complete the penetration of the Siegfried Line and reduced the city prior to an attack on the city proper. The division operation was

supported by VII Corps artillery and all available air effort of the Ninth Air Force.

### THE PRINCIPAL ANTAGONISTS

War is the contention between two or more states through their armed forces for the purpose of overpowering each other and imposing such conditions of peace as the victor pleases.

L.F.L Openheim: International Law, ii,  
1906

Politically, the three major allies were a diverse organization of normally limited compatibility, forced into an uneasy coalition for the conduct of war. A democratic and isolationist United States had resisted active participation during initial German conquests and remained politically and militarily neutral until attacked by the Japanese. Even then, there remained a significant element opposed to involvement in the European War. However, President Roosevelt (4) used American moral outrage over the surprise attack to openly declare war on Japan. Germany, upholding the Italian, German, Japanese Alliance Pact, then declared war on the United States.

Britain remained a predominantly democratic government with heavy socialistic influences predicated on its

vast colonial empire. Standing alone in the face of German domination and faced with a total loss of its colonial possessions, Britain advocated American participation as necessary to prevent future German dominance of the world. Upon American entrance, Britain attempted to control and manipulate strategic objectives to coincide with its political and economic objectives. However, Britain was forced to acquiesce in face of its almost total dependence on American war production.

Russia's communist political system was not far from, if not actually, a total dictatorship under Stalin. (5) Normal Central Committee influence had indeed been primarily subjugated to the will of Stalin and the military chiefs. Political motivations ran the spectrum from initial survival to ultimate domination of the greater portion of eastern Europe. Almost total secrecy of Russian internal policy decisions generally precludes an exact analysis of Russian motivations and decision points. However, at the time of Aachen, Russia was openly stressing Allied offensive actions to reduce pressure on the eastern front and quickly end the war.

The Allied economies were generally fully involved in wartime production. Russia and Britain suffered severe losses in early war operations and were heavily dependent on U.S. war production. Britain's primary economic need was to maintain control of its colonial resource base to insure a capacity to rebuild after the war. Russia, though undeclared at

the time, sought external agricultural sources to meet increasing food demands and western technology to modernize its industrial base.

The United States' expanded war mobilization and production enabled it to recover from the Great Depression. Although it was not apparent at the beginning of the war, American policy makers soon began to understand the need for external sources of resource supply and began active policy formulation to obtain long term economic ties.

In November 1941, Adolf Hitler pointed out that, " All my life long I have been a prophet. I always was laughed at, but in the end I was right. I want once more to be a prophet: Never will there be in Germany a repetition of 1918! It simply cannot be repeated. Anything is conceivable, save only one thing, that Germany should capitulate! Our enemies may say, 'Well, then the war will last to 1941'. Let it last as long as it will! The last battalion on the field will be a German one ". (6)

Politically, the memories of the First World War served as an underlying basis for German participation and persistence in the Second World War. Hitler and the members of his National Socialist Party believed that, had the political leadership been stronger, had the preparation and planning been more thorough, and had the national commitment been more firm, Germany would have won the First World War. Hitler said that,

"The Germany of that time laid down its arms at a quarter to twelve o'clock. But I, as a matter of principle, have always stopped at five minutes after twelve." (7) It is in statements such as these that one can see the determination of the political leadership to fight to the end, to exhort the troops at Aachen to fight to the last bullet, and to continue mobilization efforts to squeeze the last bit of production capacity out of its people and its industry.

Directly related to these feelings, and also associated with the German involvement in the First World War, was the German nation's desire to establish hegemony over the European continent. Hitler believed that once this had been accomplished and a solid economic base had been established, Germany could then begin to build a strong navy, add a colonial empire in Africa, and take its place as one of the great world powers beside the British Empire, Japan, France, and the United States.

Upon becoming Chancellor in 1933, and later, Hitler set about consolidating his political power that would eventually saturate every facet of German social and political life. With the later disbandment of political parties other than his own, the breakup of the existing labor unions, and the suppression and outright execution of those who opposed him, Hitler's control over the country was pervasive. Promises made good to rearm the military, and slick alliances with the giants

of private industry, combined with often used intimidation, insured him the control of the principal means to actively pursue both his national and international objectives.

Just as in the First World War, economic factors played an important part in determining national objectives and indirectly, upon the results of battle being fought. At the beginning of the war, Germany was economically strong, carrying on trade with a number of foreign countries. Germany relied heavily on oil and other strategic imports for its livelihood. Prewar plans resulted in stockpiling of strategic reserves, which were supposed to suffice until military conquests could result in the capture of areas which would provide an endless supply of material and resources, both for the homefront and for the military effort. Since Hitler's rise to power in 1933, millions of Germans had been put back to work and Germany's industrial base had been firmly established to support the war effort. The stockpiles and industrial strength were such that Hitler felt confident of victory when the war began.

By 1942 however, things had begun to change. Germany had felt the first crushing blows of defeat on the eastern front, a development which disrupted Hitler's plans of lightning fast victories. Casualties began to mount, the stockpiles had been exhausted, and manpower for the armed forces was becoming a problem. As the war progressed, reverses in the east denied the Germans needed food resources and oil reserves

upon which they had counted and which they had captured only a short period before. Continued heavy losses made the manpower crises even worse. To react to this situation, working hours at plants and factories were extended and production of commodity goods for household consumption, already only one-third of the total production of the country, was further curtailed. Additionally, working age limits were expanded and workers involved in public service functions not directly associated with the war effort were either pressed into service in the armaments industry or into the military. It was from this quest for military manpower that the economy suffered the most. By September 1944, the skilled, healthy workers needed for the armaments industry were gone, their place taken by the less able-bodied, the less skilled, and a massive influx of foreign workers whose commitment to the German war effort was even less than that of those whose place they had taken. (8)

It must also be noted that, by September 1944, German industry had felt the weight of the Allied bombing attacks, which, besides the demoralizing effect it had on the workers, had reduced production capacity. Added to this, imports had all but been cut off, worsening a fuel shortage of both coal and oil and adding to the difficulties of the Germans to resupply and reinforce the Aachen forces.

Social and religious factors, often mixed with political philosophies, also played a significant role in the



German initiation of the conflict. But it is not clear if these beliefs were widely held in Germany, or whether they were imposed on the nation by the dominating National Socialists. While the political and economic factors have been discussed, perhaps they were only the publically announced/official reasons for Germany's initiation of hostilities. In this, the conquest of Russia was the cornerstone of Hitler's European phase, and was inextricably linked with the extermination of the 'bacilli', the Jews. In Hitler's concept, the Jews were behind the Bolshevik Revolution and had gained control over Russia. He viewed Russia therefore, as the global center from which the Jewish/Communist danger radiated, a danger which was particularly threatening to the Aryan race and its German core. (9) Hitler viewed Bolshevism as the consummate rule of Jewry, and democracy, as it had developed in the west and in Weimar Germany, as a preliminary stage of Bolshevism. While these factors played no direct role at Aachen, they do serve to show how closely interwoven the social, racist, religious, and political factors were in the philosophy of the German leadership. Thus, to them, military and economic expansion-- continental hegemony-- and the defeat of Russia/Western Europe had not racial, but political strategic, and demographic underpinnings. (10)

### National (Strategic) Objectives

One of the great advances of our time is recognition that one of the ways to prevent war is to deter it by having the will and the capacity to use force to punish the aggressor.

John Foster Dulles, Address at  
Williams College, Williamstown,  
Mass., 6 October 1956.

Allied strategic objectives had been set forth at the Casablanca Conference on January 24, 1943. (11) President Roosevelt announced that the Anglo-American alliance would accept nothing less than the unconditional surrender of the Axis enemy. This pronouncement became known as the policy of Unconditional Surrender and had the open, albeit tentative, approval of Prime Minister Churchill and Stalin. (12) In later statements and private recollections, Churchill admitted that he and the war cabinet would not have chosen those particular terms as they implied "no quarter" for the German nation. This policy would surely cement the will of the German people to total resistance at a time when intelligence indicated growing internal opposition to the Nazi regime. (13)

Stalin never openly advocated the policy, for apparently the same reason, until 1945, when it was clear that the German nation and people could not concentrate the means to continue effective resistance. Conversely, he continued broadcasts aimed at dividing the German government and Army from the general population by avowing a wish to quickly end the war without the necessity of totally destroying the German nation. (14)

The policy of Unconditional Surrender reinforced the American President's desire to maintain the public's perception of a moral issue and a corresponding need to totally defeat the evil Nazi regime. (15) Additionally, the United States sought Russian participation in the war against Japan, and, to this end, was heavily reinforcing the Red Army with lend-lease supplies and avidly following the policy of Europe First. Roosevelt also considered German Prussianism as a major causative factor in the three previous European wars. As such, he believed it should be totally defeated and dispersed. (16) Roosevelt also tended to discount persistent fears of Russia's ultimate objectives and suppressed any open discussions which might adversely impact Allied unity. (17)

Britain's view of Europe was materially different than that of the U.S., primarily where Russian intentions after the war were concerned. British policy was directed toward the

military defeat of Germany, but not the total dismantling of the German nation. They sought a balanced policy which would not repeat the shortcomings of the Versailles Treaty of World War I, yet would maintain a German state capable of buffering Russia's advances and domination from the East. (18) Britain also sought to extend influence throughout the Balkan and Mediterranean areas; thus they continually pushed for an Anglo-American invasion of that area. (19)

The actual strategic war policy of the Anglo-American Supreme Allied Command was the conduct of a broad front attack along northern, central, and southern axes of advance to destroy all German forces and simultaneously seize the industrial Ruhr and Saar regions. (20) The objective on the northern axis was to open the port of Antwerp to shorten lines of communication and continue the attack north of Frankfurt to the Elbe River and Berlin. (21) The objective on the southern front was to destroy enemy forces, prevent a concentrated defense, and if necessary, conduct secondary attacks into the Stuttgart-Nuremberg area to split the country. (22) It is noteworthy to point out British dissention in this plan in favor of a single pronged, British-led advance deep into Germany, with the objective of Berlin to bypass German forces, and eventual force capitulation. (23)

The situation immediately prior to the Battle of Aachen was characterized by stiffening German resistance along

its frontiers, government exhortation to defend the homeland at all costs, short Allied logistics, the failure of the Arnhem operation, and a general Allied recognition of the necessity of defeating Germany in a slow, tough, town to town campaign.

German strategic objectives have already been discussed, but it must be noted that Hitler fully realized that the success of his strategy depended heavily on fighting and winning against one country at a time, and avoiding situations similar to that in which Germany found itself in World War I: he wanted to avoid fighting a two front war. In pursuing these objectives, he believed he had to win fast in each instance, and that the raw material and foodstuffs from the conquered territories in the east would be vital in successfully fighting Great Britain and, if necessary, the United States. Germany sought to establish her dominance in Europe, the extermination of the Jews and their Bolshevik counterparts, and take what she envisioned as her place as a great world power with a colonial empire; a world power that could stand against any conceivable opponent. (24)

In pursuit of the nation's vital interest, Hitler began to build the internal coalitions and establish the political organization required to mobilize the resources and energies of Germany in pursuit of its war objectives. Emphasis was placed on production of arms and munitions at the expense of consumer and export goods. Ministries and directorates, filled

with party loyalists, were established to channel the nation's efforts. Before the war ended, at least three total mobilizations of Germany's population and industrial complex had taken place. Always accompanied by an active propaganda campaign to exhort the workers to do more for less, Hitler sought to establish his concept of Volksgemeinschaft (folk-unitedness or one-great-commons). Hitler believed that the years of peace had to be used to build national unity, to build a populace that would be willing to sacrifice for the Fatherland, and to work "til five minutes after twelve o'clock". He believed that it was not the military that had failed in the First World War, but that the political leadership's failure to develop the national will, the national unity needed to endure in the final stretch, caused the German nation to be defeated. Through propaganda, control of the labor unions, suppression of the free press and political opposition, through alliances with big business, and through his control of the military, Hitler established control by the National Socialists to insure that the national unity would be there when needed. A review of the historical literature indicates he was not successful in this venture. The fact that the troops at Aachen did not fight to the last bullet, the fact that local civilians did not actively resist to any great extent, and the partial evacuation of Aachen against the expressed orders of Hitler and the party, bear testimony to the failure of this policy upon which Hitler so heavily depended.

## MILITARY SYSTEMS

Militarism does not consist in the existence of any Army, nor even in the existence of a very great Army. Militarism is a spirit. It is a point of view. It is a system. It is a purpose. The purpose of militarism is to use armies for aggression.

Woodrow Wilson, speech at West Point,  
13 June 1916.

The German military consisted of land, air and naval forces, the latter being the weakest. Prior to World War II, the military was selective about whom it took in regardless of the arm. This was particularly true in the officer corps. For this reason, the quality of the German military at the outset of the war was extremely high.

Unless they had already volunteered for one of the services, German youths were called up when they reached nineteen years of age. After 1935, the duration of conscript service was two years, although during the actual conduct of the war, the period was expanded to the duration of the conflict, though men over thirty-five years old were replaced in the line by younger

men when possible. (25)

It is difficult to say exactly how many of each age group were actually called upon to serve, but it must have been in excess of 75%, as the standards deteriorated as the war continued. It is estimated that approximately 3.6% of the total population of Germany, including the Sudatenland, Alsace, and parts of Poland, passed through the military each year. At its peak in 1943, the German military consisted of approximately 9.48 million men. After that time, and during the period in which the Battle of Aachen was fought, Germany was no longer able to replace her losses, and attempts to do so cost her dearly in the arms and munitions industries. By 1944, her strength had declined to 9.42 million, many of which by that time were not of the quality or spirit of those who had initiated the conflict in 1939. (26) As intimated above, the Germans used what they could of men from occupied lands to supplement their internal manpower sources. It is estimated that, by the Summer of 1943, some Wehrmacht divisions consisted of 20% foreigners. (27)

At the outset of the conflict, the German military was a well trained, disciplined, cohesive organization. Training stressed mastery of the individual weapon, fundamental tactics taught during numerous unit exercises, and independence of action and initiative. They made extensive use of recent returnees from the front to teach the latest lessons learned. Often these recent returnees, many recovering from wounds received in action,



trained replacements for their own divisions. This, and a unit cohesion built through a replacement and training system that stressed the worth of the individual, and which sought to place recruits with formations from their geographic home of origin, facilitated training and added to the fighting power of the German Army.

To highlight the emphasis that the German military placed on training, even as late as 1944, infantrymen received between 12 and 14 weeks of basic combat training, and those in armor, between 16 and 21 weeks of training. In addition, recruits could expect to undergo further training in their divisions before entering the line. (28)

The Allied Forces consisted of the fully mobilized forces of the United States and Great Britain with supplemental armies from occupied European countries and Canada. The majority of American and British forces, combined with their Allies, formed the single most powerful military force ever assembled in one theater of operations against a single enemy force or nation.

The Allied combat forces consisted of men in the general age category of 17-45 years of age with exceptions in some of the additional forces and the British Army, primarily due to the heavy losses suffered in the early stages of the war. In conflict, their forces were spread over vast distances. Although not in uniform, the majority of the American and British

populations were involved in some form of war production or support program. The conduct of World War II required the total dedication and mobilization of the populations, resources, and industrial capacities of both countries.

With regard to the U.S. forces specifically, its share of land forces never quite reached 50 percent of the total force. At its highest in 1944, the land force share of the total military structure reached only about 48.5 percent of the total, or about 5,575,000 out of 11,484,000.

In his research, Van Creveld estimated that the military never grew larger than 8.7 percent of the total population of the United States, estimated at the time to be about 135,000,000.

(29) In the European Theater of Operations in which the Battle of Aachen occurred, the U.S. alone committed close to four million soldiers between 1942 and 1945. (30)

It is estimated that, between 1940 and 1945, the U.S. called approximately 13,000,000 individuals into service, primarily in the age group 18-45 years old. Initially drawing from a large manpower pool, high entrance standards resulted in high rejection rates among those who volunteered or who were conscripted. Until as late as 1943, approximately 50 percent of those examined were rejected, and in all, the rate was approximately 29 percent. Selection and eventual classification of soldiers in jobs stressed physical fitness, previously

acquired occupational skills, and intellectual capacity. (31)  
This, combined with the wide age spread of citizens available for service, led to a large number of high quality, relatively well-educated soldiers thus entered the military.

Training in the U.S. Army was the responsibility of the Army Ground Forces, which placed strong emphasis on graduation from individual to unit training, elementary education, maintenance of unit integrity and realism in training. Unlike the German system which was discussed earlier, there was no direct link between ultimate units of assignment and the training unit. Training was more mechanical and placed great emphasis on producing men who could perform their tasks almost automatically and without thinking. Also unlike the Germans, less emphasis was placed on building unit cohesion or esprit during the training phase and, until very late in the war, few field tested cadre were rotated to assume positions in the training base. (32)

Training usually lasted about 13-17 weeks, although this varied throughout the war, as it did by skill. While additional training was conducted in the overseas replacement depots, on the whole, the U.S. recruits received less basic military training than did his German counterpart. (33)

The Allied Forces were primarily equipped with U.S.-produced weapons, however, the British did maintain a surprising industrial capacity for Army equipment production.

Generally, the Allies had superior numbers of artillery, tanks, aircraft, and all forms of crew served and individual weapons. Though superior in numbers, the Allied weapons were inferior to German technology on a one for one basis, with the exception of individual and crew served weapons. By the time the Battle of Aachen occurred, however, the Germans could not muster enough first class forces to take advantage of their technological superiority. Additionally, by October 1944, the Allies had continuous air superiority over the Aachen area, and for all practical purposes, over the continent of Europe.

### PREVIOUS PERFORMANCE

It is not an Army that we must train for war; it is a nation.

Woodrow Wilson, Speech, 12 May 1917.

In its most recent prior conflict, the Germany Army had fought well, but was materially and industrially defeated. Cut off and isolated, the people had suffered terribly in the conflict, and the loss of human life left a lasting impression on those who survived. As Hitler launched Germany into World War II, the public was passive and apprehensive at best. Militarily, Germany had been well led by the standards of the time and had given a good account of herself. As indicated previously, Hitler believed that, had the people and the economy persevered a little longer, they could have won World War I. His efforts to establish his "one-great-commons" were designed to build a military and industrial base to wage a war of expansion and racial extermination and, in the final analysis, perhaps his methods of imposing the "one-great-commons" and the sacrifices he expected of the German people were not in congruence with those of the general public. As a result, the cohesiveness he desired in society never came about, and much of the support he had initially enjoyed had deserted him by the time the Allies knocked

on Germany's door at Aachen. At that point, even many in the military realized the futility of going on. One of those was Lieutenant General Count Schwerin, (34) Commander of the 116th Panzer Division which opposed the U.S. Forces at Aachen, who had once been relieved on the Eastern Front for not fighting to the last man, and who against Nazi Party orders, initially ordered the evacuation of Aachen. (35)

The primary nations concerned had been previous adversaries in World War I, however, very little of that experience remained on the American side. The advantage of prior experience was fairly well negated by the revolution in tactics and technology in the interwar period. The major combatants had seen numerous prior wars, and as the conflict continued on, developed a healthy respect for the power of the other. Neither had experienced total defeat on the battlefield.

In the early years of the war, Germany had totally defeated the combined armies of Europe and driven the Russians deep into their own country. However, the Germans had been slowly driven back on all fronts, were totally outnumbered, and severely constrained by supply and consumer goods shortages. The British Army had suffered initial defeats in all sectors, held the line, and renewed the attack when supplemented by American Forces and equipment. They were proud professionals with a long tradition, fighting to protect their country. The American Forces had never

seen defeat in war, were driven by the democratic motive, and possessed a proud tradition of fighting for freedom.

The British and American Armies were totally supportive of national objectives, and, by 1944, had the full support of the populations of their respective countries. British resolve was formed in the German attempt to subdue the British Isles by bombing and in their single handed defense for two years in 1940 and 1941. They sought the total defeat of the German military, but as previously stated, their political aim fell short of advocating the total destruction of the German state.

The American population supported the war effort as necessary to restore order in Europe and defeat Japan for their surprise attack at Pearl Harbor. Additionally, reports of atrocities by the Germans "fueled the fire" for the total destruction of the German military and the German nation. Each country was totally supportative of the war effort and fully involved in war support functions. The German people had suffered greatly, and the political structure was beginning to break. They maintained a cohesive front only out of desperation and the exhortations of their leader to defend the homeland from the invading Allies.

With economic and political unrest, and many military leaders questioning, not only Hitler's generalship, but his

motives to continue, the battle for Aachen began.



## ENDNOTES

1. Dwight David Eisenhower was born in Kansas in 1890, graduated from West Point, and served in various command and staff positions prior to World War II. Considered an expert in organization, he was appointed Commander-in-Chief of Allied Forces North Africa in 1942, prior to becoming Supreme Commander, Western Europe, in 1944. His most notable war contribution was his ability to coordinate the efforts of the Allied staff. Elected President of the United States in 1952, he served two terms and remained active until his death in 1969.

2. Charles Whiting, Bloody Aachen, (New York: Playboy Press Paperbacks, 1980), p. 26.

3. Irving Werstein, The Battle of Aachen, (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1962), preface.

4. Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1882-1945) served an unprecedented three terms as President of the United States (1933-1945) and was elected to a fourth term before his death.

5. Joseph Stalin was born in 1879. An early Social Democrat and Bolshevik, he was closely associated with Lenin. Active

participation in the February Revolution led him to become the Secretary of the Central Committee and successor to Lenin. After conducting extensive purges of his opponents, he personally commanded the Russian Army Forces in World War II and remained absolute dictator until his death in 1953.

6. Max Seydewitz, Civil Life in Wartime Germany, The Story of the Homefront, (New York: The Viking Press, 1945). p. 358.

7. Ibid., p. 358.

8. Ibid., pp. 108-330.

9. Andreas Hillgruber, Germany and the Two World Wars, trans. William C. Kirby (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1981). p. 51.

10. Ibid., p. 51.

11. Anne Armstrong, Unconditional Surrender, (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1961), p. 59.

12. Winston Leonard Spencer Churchill was born to aristocratic parents in 1874. He served in successive positions as soldier, war correspondent, and member of Parliament prior to becoming First Lord of the Admiralty in 1911. Following World War I, he briefly served in various government positions, but his loud

vocal warnings against Nazi Germany kept him out of public office until he was appointed to the First Admiralty by Chamberlain in 1939. He became Prime Minister in 1940 and led Britain in that position until 1945. He again served as Prime Minister from 1951 to 1955 and died in 1965.

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14. Ibid., p. 42.

15. Ibid., p. 55.

16. Ibid., p. 18.

17. Ibid., p. 31.

18. Ibid., p. 37.

19. Ibid., pp. 45-48.

20. Ibid.

21. John Ehrman, Grand Strategy Volume V, (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1956), p. 524.

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24. Hillgruber, Germany and the Two World Wars, p. 87.

25. Martin Van Creveld, Fighting Power-German Military Performance, 1914-1945, (Potomac, Maryland: C&L Associates, 1980), p. 74.

26. Ibid.

27. Seydewitz, Civil Life in Wartime Germany, p. 270.

28. Van Creveld, Fighting Power, p.85.

29. Ibid., p. 79.

30. Ibid., p. 133.

31. Ibid., pp. 79-80.

32. Ibid., p. 86.

33. Ibid.

34. General Gerhard Graf von Schwerin was the wartime commander of the 116th Panzer Division which opposed the 1st Infantry

Division in the vicinity of Aachen. A descendant of a noble family with a rich military tradition, General von Schwerin entered military service prior to World War I at the age of fifteen, after completing Kadetten Korps, similar to West Point. In World War I, he fought in France and Russia as a member of the Imperial Guards. Following the War, he left the military only to return with the rebuilding of the Reichwehr in the 1920's. In 1929 he joined the General Staff in Berlin where he headed the Department for British and American Armies, Office of Foreign Armies. In 1930-1931 he toured the United States where he gained an appreciation for its industrial strength and military potential, of which he cautioned his superiors. After touring England shortly thereafter, he also warned his superiors of England's intention to enter the conflict if Germany invaded Poland. As a result of clashes with his superiors over the above two reports, he was assigned a field command as a battalion commander, and later as commander of the Regiment Gros Deutschland. He commanded the Regiment Gros Deutschland in the campaign against France and at Dunkirk against the British. Following his assignment with Regiment Gros Deutschland, he served as a Regimental Commander in the 10th Panzer Division, and later as a Regimental Commander in the newly formed Africa Corps. Following his return from Africa in 1941 he was assigned to the Russian Front as a Regimental Commander in the 20th Panzer Grenadier Division near St. Petersburg. Shortly thereafter, he was promoted to Brigadier General and appointed as commander of the then 16th Panzer Grenadier Division. Sometime after the

Spring of 1943, General von Schwerin brought the 16th Panzer Grenadier Division back to France and converted it into the 116th Panzer Division. Besides being relieved for his actions in halting the evacuation of Aachen, General von Schwerin was relieved of command two other times; the first time was on the Russian Front and the second, as a result of action in the Falaise gap. Each time he was cleared of allegations against him and reinstated in command. At the close of the war, he was assigned as a Korps commander in Italy.

35. Art Chaitt. "View From the Other Side," Bridgehead Sentinel, Summer 1965. pp. 1-5.

## CHAPTER 3

# **The Tactical Situation**

The conduct of war resembles the workings of an intricate machine with tremendous friction, so that combinations which are easily planned on paper can be executed only with effort.

Clausewitz: Principles of War 1812

This chapter will review the physical aspects of the area of operations, compare the opposing forces to ascertain their combat effectiveness, review the military objective of each antagonist, and conclude with an overview of the feasible courses of actions available to the opposing commanders.

### THE AREA OF OPERATIONS

Where armies take the field it is fate knocking at the door, it is nature deciding the life and death of nations.

Alfred Machin, 1888

The fall and winter of 1944 were atypical. Record precipitation and low temperatures were experienced throughout Central Europe. Excessive rains during September had placed severe restrictions on ground movement, impacting most directly on sustainability operations, but also hampering progress in the tactical situation. As secondary roads were washed out or reduced to muddy quagmires, resupply operations in the Aachen area were limited to only a few hard surface roads. October provided more of the same poor weather conditions with even lower temperatures. This cold, damp climate had a greater impact on the American Forces, who lived in foxholes, than the Germans who defended from pillboxes and built-up areas. (1) In addition to increased discomfort, these conditions caused serious problems with trenchfoot and respiratory ailments among the Americans. Although one might think this weather would dampen the fighting spirit of the Americans, it actually increased their aggressiveness because the soldiers always endeavored to capture the next village or town and gain protection from the elements.

From a tactical perspective, the weather had several other impacts. Low clouds and overcast conditions allowed only sporadic air support. Tactically, air support was always planned for but could never be counted on. Prior to the actual assault on Aachen, these non-flying days allowed the Germans to stockpile supplies and prepare their defenses in the city uninhibited. (2) During the first two days of the assault, 11-12 October, the weather permitted successful use of air power. On 11 October, the



Air Corps bombed Aachen for five straight hours and aerial observers directed the fires of ten artillery battalions in preparing the way for the ground force assault. (3)

Unfortunately, the weather again turned bad from 13-15 October and the Germans were able to reinforce the defenders of Aachen without the threat of interdiction. (4) From 16 October until the surrender of the city on 22 October, the flying conditions were generally good and air support was effectively used to maintain air superiority, seal off the area, and provide close air support for the ground forces. Only forty enemy aircraft were sighted during the entire battle. (5)

The weather also affected tactical mobility within the area. Aachen is located between and downstream of the Muese and Roer Rivers. Heavy rains had turned the numerous streams throughout the area into significant barriers to cross country movement. Coupled with the soft, wet ground, these streams limited movement to the established road network and bridges. Of course, these restrictions had the greatest impact on supply routes approaching Aachen and caused significant delays in bringing forward and stockpiling supplies needed to support the assault on the city. Within the city itself, the weather had no impact on tactical mobility.

Historically, Aachen has been the gateway to the Cologne plains. It is nestled under the northern slopes of the Ardennes and sits at the bottom of a large bowl or amphitheater. (6) As

such, it is surrounded by generally higher ground. Observation and fields of fire outside the city were limited in the wooded areas to the south and west, but excellent in the north and eastern outskirts where three hills towered over the city. Together, they were called the Lousberg Heights. The largest and northernmost of these hills rose to an elevation of 862 feet and was known as Observatory Hill. A lower knob on its southeast slope, topped by a cathedral, was called Salvatorberg. On the final hill was Farwick Park and the Quellenhof Hotel, which served as the initial German command post. (7) Generally free of heavy vegetation, these three hills provided poor cover and concealment, but were scattered with numerous bunkers and pillboxes. Direct fire weapons were employed from these positions to protect the northern and northeastern approaches into Aachen and indirect fires were adjusted into the city. Within the city itself, observation and fields of fire were poor, being restricted to major streets and avenues. German forces defending the city had constructed several bunkers and pillboxes at key intersections, maximizing what fields of fire and weapons were available. (8)

Because the inherent nature of urban combat is so close and closed, and the majority of buildings in Aachen were of heavy stone or masonry construction, cover and concealment for both the attacker and defender were excellent. Outside the city, only the wooded and hilly southern approach toward Aachen provided cover and concealment, since the Lousberg Heights dominated the more

open approaches from the north and east. (9)

As an integral part of the Siegfried Line, Aachen was part of an extensive obstacle plan. the western approaches were covered with mutually supporting pillboxes. These hardened positions, protected by minefields, wire entanglements, dragonsteeth and other obstacles, were constructed of concrete walls six to seven feet thick. Several rounds of high explosive ammunition and approximately 400 pounds of TNT were necessary to penetrate and destroy each one. (10) As a result, movement toward Aachen was slow and very costly with regard to ammunition supplies. Assuming an Allied attack into the city itself would come from the traditional western approach or wooded southern approach, the Germans had organized their obstacles and fighting positions accordingly. Of special concern to the American Forces were the obstacles placed along the southern edge of Aachen. This boundry was marked by a railroad line built on a raised embankment. The embankment was 15 to 30 feet high with very steep sides. There was only one underpass through the embankment and the Germans had blocked it. (11) Although there were some mines on the southern side of this embankment, the greatest obstacles were the soft, wet ground and the embankment itself. There were few manmade obstacles in the city. Other than the pillboxes and bunkers, which have already been mentioned, most blockades, mines and wire obstacles were oriented to channelize an enemy attacking from the west into the major streets and avenues where good fields of fire benefited the defenders. Since the American attack

was from the east, these obstacle plans were of marginal benefit.  
(12)

From the tactical point of view, key terrain for the battle was the Lousberg Heights hill complex north and northeast of the city. Since these three hills dominated the city and the critical northern approaches, they were of value to both sides. The Germans wanted to maintain control of them for several reasons: they overlooked Aachen, controlled the main, and eventually only, ground link to their higher headquarters as the sole source of supplies and reinforcements, and protected their initial command post and logistical stockpiles. Once the fighting in the city itself began, pillboxes and bunkers located at critical intersections became key to controlling the major streets and avenues. Additionally, the city's sewer system became key terrain as a covered and concealed line of communication.

Aachen sits adjacent to terrain that is compartmentalized east and west, offering an excellent avenue of approach into Germany through Cologne, the Rhine River and Berlin. With regard to the Aachen area, there were limited avenues of approach. There was only one road from the west that the Germans had been unable to close. This was the Moresnet-Gemmenich-Aachen Road. But it was very narrow and crossed the swollen Gueule Creek. (13) The approaches from the north and east were generally open, offering high speed access to the city, but were vulnerable to long range direct fire weapons and dominated by the Lousberg Heights. The

southern approach was heavily wooded and hilly, providing good cover and concealment, but slower movement. (14) Within the city itself, major east-west streets offered the best avenues of approach, but as mention earlier, they were primarily defended against attacks from the west. Since these streets also provided excellent observation and fields of fire, another more secure route within the city was through the side walls of the aligned buildings. This alternate route avoided major obstacles and presented the greatest cover from observation and fires, but was slower, provided less maneuver space, and required considerable amounts of explosives. (15) Of the approaches into the city, weather, terrain and obstacles hindered those from the west, north and east. But, once in the city, the approaches from the east were most favorable.

### COMPARISON OF OPPOSING FORCES

The best form of "welfare" for the troops is first-class training.

Erwin Rommel: Rommel Papers, ix,  
1953

Initially, the Germans had assigned the defense of Aachen to the 116th Panzer Division of the LXXXI Corps. (16) But Hitler became suspicious of their loyalty as a result of events that occurred as they prepared to defend the city. In late September, he relieved the Commanding General and transferred the division to theater reserve. (17) The 246th Volksgrenadier Division replaced the 116th Panzer Division. To this amalgamated division fell the task of defending the first city on German soil to be attacked by the Allies. It was a critical decision with serious consequences. The 246th VG Division had been formed only three months before the Battle of Aachen and comprised a very heterogeneous group. (18) At the time it was assigned the mission to defend the city, one of the regimental commanders was serving as acting commander. Not until the day after the American surrender ultimatum had been rejected did the actual commander, Colonel Gerhard Wilck, arrive to take charge of all military and

civilian forces in the city. His orders were to defend Aachen to the last man. (19)

To accomplish this mission, the 246th VG Division was given three infantry regiments (the 404th, 689th, and 352d), the 34th Machine Gun Fortress Battalion, 453rd Replacement Battalion, XIX German Air Force (GAF) Battalion, and a battle group consisting of 150 personnel that were remnants of the decimated 1st SS Panzer Division. (20) Forty percent of the 246th VG Division were reclassified naval personnel with a fair percentage of the rest deferred defense workers. (21) The ranks of the 689th Regiment were filled with old men and cripples. The 352d Regiment had been decimated just prior to Aachen and suffered from incomplete reconstitution. (22) The XIX GAF Battalion was a Luftwaffe unit converted to infantry with little training, weapons, or morale. (23) The 453rd Replacement Battalion was formed with men between the ages of 50 and 60 years old. (24) The total strength of these forces was approximately 6500. (25)

Civilians were not included in these figures. Of the 163,000 residents of Aachen, all but 10,000 had been evacuated. The vast majority of these civilians evacuated Aachen during the initial artillery and aerial bombardment of the city. Only 1000 civilians remained in the city throughout the fighting. (26)

With respect to heavy weapons, the defenders of Aachen had limited resources. They possessed a total of five Mark IV

tanks, nineteen 105-mm howitzers, eight 75-mm pieces and six 150-mm guns. (27)

Reinforcements for the 246th VGD, if needed, were supposed to come from the theater reserve, specifically the 3rd Panzer Grenadiers and the 116th Panzer Division. Unfortunately, when the 3rd PGD was alerted to reinforce Aachen, they were held up by poor rail lines and never reached their objective. (28)

The American forces involved in the battle were from the United States First Army commanded by Lieutenant General Courtney H. Hodges. VII Corps was commanded by Major General J. Lawton Collins and consisted of the 1st Infantry Division, 9th Infantry Division and 3rd Armored Division. The 1st Infantry Division consisted of three Infantry Regiments (26th, 18th, and 16th) and the 1106th Engineer Group. The 18th Regiment was to attack north and seize Hill 231 (Ravels Hill) in the vicinity of Haargen, the 16th Regiment was to attack north and seize Hill 239 (Crucifix Hill) in the vicinity of Verlautheide, and the 26th Regiment, minus 1st Battalion attached to the 3rd Armored Division, was to attack Aachen from the east-southeast. The 2nd Battalion had three companies and each had assigned to it three tanks or tank destroyers, two 57-mm ATG, two bazooka teams, one flame-thrower, and two heavy machine guns. The 3rd Battalion was comparable to the 2nd. (29) The 1st Division used elements of the 1106 Engineer Group for Infantry tasks as well as in the role of engineers. The 1st Infantry Division was supported by the following organic



Artillery units: 57th FA BN (155mm), 7th FA Bn (105mm), 32nd FA Bn (105mm), 33rd FA Bn (105mm). Corps units attached to the Division were the 58th FA Bn (Armored) (105mm), 957th TD Bn (155mm) and the 634th TD Bn (3"HE). During the month of October, artillery units fired 4,670 missions with a total of 94,842 rounds fired. Of the total rounds fired, 76,544 were from organic units and the remaining 18,298 were from the attached units. (30) The 1st Infantry Division had surrounded the city and had all of its forces committed and could take its time to reduce and capture the city. The Americans had the advantage in forces, experienced leadership, fire support, air support, resupply and overall coordination.

## TECHNOLOGY

In War, only what is simple can succeed.

Paul Von Hindenburg, 1847-1934.

The American forces had the technological advantage for fighting in built up areas. The Sherman tank was smaller than the Mark IV and could move more quickly in the tight confines of a city. The German concrete pillboxes were practically impregnable, requiring several hits from direct fire artillery to knock them out. In the case of artillery, the American battalion which attacked into the city with a 155-mm self-propelled howitzer and, when used in the direct fire role, played a major part in the elimination of German resistance. (31) Obviously, neither side could take advantage of the technological aspects of their weapons' ranges, but the Americans demonstrated a decided advantage in using their larger guns in the direct fire role. American air superiority, on days when weather permitted flying, was also a critical factor. (32)

## LOGISTICAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEMS

War is a shabby, really impractical thing, anyway, and it takes a genius to conduct it with any sort of economy and efficiency.

William Faulkner: At West Point,  
20 April 1962

Surprisingly, the Germans had a fairly effective resupply system. Years earlier, Hitler had ordered stockpiling of ammunition in the concrete bunkers of Aachen. Starting in mid September, they added to these large stockpiles of food and ammunition, although, due to American air superiority, not as much as had been intended. Once fighting for the city itself commenced, the Germans were able to keep open the critical resupply routes to the north and northeast until 15 October. This made a significant contribution to their ability to resist surrender for as long as they did. But eventually, the American encirclement had its effect. When the defenders of Aachen surrendered, they possessed only enough food and ammunition to last an estimated six more hours. (33) Even though they had shorter interior lines of communication, the Germans were unable to build up sufficient levels of supplies to meet their needs for this defense.

The American forces supply lines extended all the way back to the Normandy Beachhead. It required a considerable logistical effort to provide the large quantity of artillery shells, hand grenades, and crew served and small arms ammunition required for the intense city fighting during the Battle for Aachen. Supplies for the attacking force were two or three days behind schedule and air resupply was used whenever weather permitted. Fuel was the most critically short supply item but, for the most part, was only needed for the resupply since the majority of the fighting during the battle was done on foot.

## COMMAND, CONTROL, AND COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEMS

Generals cannot be entrusted with anything-  
not even with war.

Georges Clemenceau, 1841-1929

As stated earlier, the Aachen defense force was a collection of units hastily formed and thrown together. Command and control can be difficult in such an organization, but in this one, inexperienced lieutenants commanded some battalions. The fact that the commander himself was only a Colonel after 28 years of continuous active service and nearly five years of combat is indicative of the kind of organizational problems encountered in the 246th VG. (34)

German command and control was very limited. The division assumed the mission of defending Aachen less than three months after it had been organized and only two weeks prior to the initial U.S. assault. During that period, little if any time had been set aside for training and the staffs at all levels were ill prepared. Since Colonel Wilck arrived in the city for the first time after the U.S. surrender ultimatum had been rejected, and only hours before the attack commenced, it is safe to assume he had little impact on the way the defense was organized. He was required to fight with hastily organized and poorly trained staffs

and units. The command post had been wisely positioned near the city's key terrain in the Quellenhof Hotel. This was the farthest point from where the U.S. forces made their initial penetration of the city and nearest the last resupply route to be closed by the American. This location also facilitated communications to superiors outside Aachen until the surrender.

The Americans, on the other hand, had a cohesive unit organization and a functioning chain of command with experienced staffs. This facilitated the 1st and 30th Infantry Divisions' encirclement and attack of Aachen. For the actual fighting in the city, radios and hand and arm signals were the principal means of communication. When possible, wire was laid, but it was continually being cut by indirect fire. Additionally, fighting was done almost exclusively during daylight in order to facilitate command and control. Phase lines were used to control movement of units together with a "Measles System" of numbering all intersections and important buildings. Coordination was made with adjacent units down to the team level as buildings were searched, cleared, and marked. (35)

## INTELLIGENCE

There is nothing certain about war except  
that one side won't win.

Sir Ian Hamilton:

Gallipoli Diary, 1920.

The Germans maintained a communications link with higher headquarters which could be used to send and receive intelligence updates. Initially, the Germans expected the attack from the south and southwest, and thus deployed forces to defend these sectors. When the attack came from the southeast, it was too late to redeploy forces.

The American Forces utilized POW's and refugees for intelligence and both reported German morale to be low. Maps were procured and distributed to the 26th Regiment on 6 October. Patrols discovered enemy strong points and minefields, anti-tank positions, and machine gun emplacements in the southern portion of the city. Thus, the attack was launched from the east, not the south as the Germans expected. (36) Overall, the U.S. forces made more effective use of their intelligence sources and assets than did the Germans.

## DOCTRINE AND TRAINING

Untutored courage is useless in the face  
of educated bullets.

George S. Patton, Jr.:

In Cavalry Journal,

April 1922.

As of 11 October, the encirclement of Aachen was approximately 60 % completed and, after refusing the surrender ultimatum, the German forces could only follow defensive doctrine. Attempts were made to relieve the defending force, but, after the 10 of October, U.S. forces repulsed these attempts and finally caused the complete encirclement of Aachen. Although the defenders were ill-trained, ill-equipped and ill-prepared for their mission, they fought stubbornly. They developed the tactic of building tunnels linking basements of buildings to prevent exposure to U.S. firepower. This allowed the German defenders to use economy of force and caused the Americans to fight for each building in the city. The 246th VGD was not trained to accomplish its mission because it had been thrown together at the last minute and was composed of a wide assortment of units. Additionally, its overall combat effectiveness was probably less than 50%. Thus, it was only a matter of time before Aachen was captured.



The U.S. forces effectively employed offensive operations to envelop, isolate and attack Aachen. The battle for the city forced the attacking U.S. units to form teams below squad level to search and clear buildings even though both platoon-and company-sized operations were planned and used. The U.S. 26th Regiment was an experienced, well-trained fighting unit, having seen continuous combat since the Normandy landing in June, 1944. Operations in the city were not hurried; in fact, patience and thoroughness were mandatory for the search of buildings. Prior to 10 October the 2nd Battalion conducted intensive training on reducing houses and buildings. (37) U.S. Forces combined infantry soldiers with anti-tank teams and artillery pieces down to the squad and fire team level. Thus, we see the U.S. doctrine of small, decentralized, combined arms teams being applied to urban operations.

### CONDITION AND MORALE

In no other profession are the penalties for employing untrained personnel so appalling or so irrevocable as in the military.

Douglas MacArthur: Annual Report,  
Chief of Staff, U.S. Army, 1933.

German force's morale was low due to lack of training, combat skills, and unit cohesion. However, most fought well because they were defending, for the first time, the soil of Germany. The German high command dropped leaflets exhorting the soldiers to fight for Germany and congratulating them on their brave actions. Hitler broadcast radio messages in the same tone. However, there were problems. At one point the Luftwaffe requested withdrawal of their anti-aircraft batteries from Aachen and, when the request was denied, the units almost mutinied. It was also a common complaint that these units often abandoned their equipment and deserted their positions at the first sound of combat. (38)

American morale was high and esprit de corps was excellent. The U.S. soldier felt a sense of destiny, belief that Germany was to be defeated, and that he played a significant part

in making the world safe. Their reputation as a successful  
dependable military force also created a strong sense of pride.

(39)

## LEADERSHIP

To lead an untrained people to war is  
to throw them away.

Confucius: Analacts, xiii, c.500 B.C.

As explained earlier, the German forces had a new commander and an inexperienced chain of command and staff. Thus, the command climate was very weak and ineffective. Leadership problems were rampant. Inexperienced leaders failed to use much of the supporting arms available to them with the exception of artillery. (40) Colonel Wilck recommended that the city be abandoned two days after the battle began, but Hitler denied the request and ordered him to defend to the last man. Therefore, Hitler had a profound effect on the battle based upon his overall strategy and orders. (41)

Conversely, the American forces enjoyed good leadership from experienced commanders, non-commissioned officers and staffs. The battle was a small unit leaders' battle with great latitude given to subordinates, although effective control and coordination measures were in effect. The U.S. forces had a decided advantage in leadership. (42)

## THE IMMEDIATE MILITARY OBJECTIVES

Get the bombs on the targets.

General Curtis E. Le May, his definition of his job as a ranking Air Force Officer during WWII.

The mission of the German 246th Division was to defend the city of Aachen to the last man--to defend one of the gateways to the heartland of Germany. Colonel Wilck's objective was to hold the line with infantry and to withdraw tanks to the rear to be used in a counterattack role. The overall plan failed because German counterattack forces were not very successful; resulting in several infantry units becoming cut off and surrounded.

The mission of the U.S. 26th Regiment was the reduction of Aachen and the defeat of the German forces occupying the city. The tactics selected to accomplish the mission were to use heavy direct fire weapons, artillery and air support to destroy the buildings and force the defenders into the basements. There, the infantry would dig them out building by building. Artillery was effectively used in a direct fire role to blast holes in walls of buildings so that soldiers could proceed through the city without exposing themselves to enemy fires in the streets. (43)

### FEASIBLE COURSE OF ACTION FOR EACH ANTAGONIST

War's very object is victory, not prolonged indecision. In war there is no substitute for victory.

General Douglas MacArthur, Address  
to a Joint Session of Congress,  
19 April 1951.

The Germans had limited military options: surrender, defend, or breakout. Hitler actually further constrained the defenders of Aachen by insisting that they defend to the last man. In effect, Colonel Wilck disobeyed the order when he did surrender, although he actually was no longer capable of defending the city.

The American military courses of action were much more feasible: encircle and reduce at leisure, bypass, or attack. Initially, the 1st Infantry Division was to move the bulk of its forces to the south of Aachen, thus completing the penetration of the Siegfried Line east of Aachen. This would have isolated the city and, hopefully, it would have capitulated without a direct assault. However, the Germans refused to surrender, and it would have required at least a division to seal and later reduce the city. The Allied Command determined it could not afford to divert

a division for that task, so a direct attack was ordered. See map two. Artillery, air, and mortars were to be used to seal off and isolate the city, while the infantry, supported by tanks, tank destroyers, and direct machinegun fire, would route the enemy from the cellars. (44) The Americans, better than the Germans, used the estimate of the situation in the decision-making process. It is doubtful that the German staff and commanders were able to use the decision-making process very much at all. Although it wasn't described as METT-T, U.S. forces had the time to consider these factors and make detailed plans. This insured effective use of all available combat power in selecting and executing a course of action.

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## CHAPTER 4

# The Fight

I suppose one of the fringe benefits of getting through an old-fashioned war is the opportunity to read about it later and find out what really did happen.

Bill Mauldin, Book Week; New York

Herald Tribune, 12 April 1964, p.3.

This chapter details the actual Battle of Aachen beginning with the disposition of forces at the start of the action. The opening moves of each force, the major phases of the battle, and key events that shaped the eventual outcome are reviewed. The chapter concludes with a detailed analysis of the Battle of Aachen examining why the American forces were victorious and the Germans lost.

### INITIAL FORCES DISPOSITIONS

In planning any operation, it is vital to remember, and constantly repeat to oneself

two things: "In war nothing is impossible provided you use audacity," and "Do not take counsel of your fears." If these two principles are adhered to, with American troops victory is certain.

General George S. Patton, Jr., War  
As I Knew It.

As of 7 October 1944, Allied forces in the Benelux Region had forced the German Army to withdraw to the east of the Dutch/German and Belgium/German borders. Using the fortified pillboxes and tank obstacles of the Siegfried Line as an integral part of their defense, they prepared to stop the Allied advance and defend Germany. Elements representing five German Divisions were either poised or maneuvering for defense in the vicinity of the city of Aachen.

As the 1st U.S. Army prepared to continue their push into Germany "General Hodges, the 1st Army Commander, felt that isolation of Aachen was a prerequisite for such an advance". (1) Consequently, "the initial plan was to encircle and bypass the city, leaving behind enough troops to force eventual capitulation. The initial scheme of maneuver called for the 30th Infantry Division to attack in the north, a 1st Infantry Division attack in the south, and a linkup of the two Divisions in the vicinity of Wierseden" (2) By 10 October, the 30th Infantry

Division had closed within two to three miles to the north of Aachen. The 1st Infantry Division, moving from the southwest of Aachen, had bypassed to the south and east and held positions less than a mile to the east of the city. "On 10 October, the Aachen suburb of Haaven was taken, cutting one of the two remaining supply routes. Less than two miles separated the two forces, but a counterattack by the 116th Panzer Division and the 3rd Panzer Grenadier Division delayed the closing of the gap until 1615 hours on 16 October ". (3)

The strong German resistance and defense of the area made it necessary for the First U.S. Army to change its plans to simply bypass and isolate the city. "The First U.S. Army Commander decided to reduce the city immediately, and the mission was given to the 1st Infantry Division". (4)

"By virtue of positions on an arc containing Aachen on the south and east, General Hubner's 1st Division was the logical choice to fulfill the role of the VII Corps."(5) The problem that faced General Hubner was reducing his "long defensive frontage-more than twelve miles along a semicircle west,south and east of Aachen-and thereby free at least one regiment to make the attack".(6) General Collins, VII Corps Commander, provided some relief to the division by putting "a Corps engineer unit, the 1106th Engineer Combat Group ... into the line south of Aachen".(7)

On 10 October, the 1st Infantry Division, consisting of three Infantry regiments and the attached 1106th Engineer Combat Group, occupied positions with the 1106th on the Division's left flank, south and west of Aachen, and the 26th and 18th Infantry Regiments in the Division's center, which was east and northeast of Aachen. The 16th Infantry Regiment was on the Division's eastern flank and tied in with the 3rd Armored Division. As of 1410 hours 11 October, the Division Reserve consisted of the 1st Battalion 16th Infantry Regiment. (8)

The actual attack of the city of Aachen was assigned to the two remaining battalions, the 2nd and 3rd, of the 26th Infantry Regiment. "The 1st Infantry had only two Infantry Battalions, the 2nd and 3rd Battalions of the 26th Infantry Regiment, available for the operation. Since the encirclement northeast of Aachen was incomplete, the 26th Infantry Commander was ordered not to get inextricably engaged in the city". (9) These battalions were located to the east of Aachen, the direction that the 246th Volks Grenadier Division had not correctly assessed as being their main threat. See map two.

Fighting in the city was anticipated to be extremely difficult, as with any combat operation in urban areas. Consequently, the two battalions were augmented with additional combat power in order to have sufficient strengths to force the Germans from the buildings of the city. "Attached to each rifle company were three tanks or tank destroyers, two 57-mm antitank

guns, one flamethrower and two additional bazooka teams". (10)  
Supporting the Division in its reduction of the city were  
elements of 26 artillery battalions.

The primary mission for defense of Aachen fell upon the newly appointed Division Commander, Colonel Gerhardt Wilck. His 246th Volks Grenadier Division had been assigned the mission of defense of the city and "not to give up one inch of ground." (11)  
In fact, Colonel Wilck had no alternative but to defend the city, "...the 7th Army Commander General Brandenberger, picked him to replace Leyherr as Battle Commandant of 'Fortress Aachen', though the Army Commander had tears in his eyes when he handed Wilck the formal declaration that he would not surrender. Hitler now insisted that all his fortress commanders should sign such a document. Brandenberger felt he was sending his old comrade to his death. For the Colonel, who had served with him in the same regiment twenty years before, had now sworn an oath not to surrender Aachen; if he did, then Hitler was empowered by the document he had signed to seize his family and have them executed". (12)

The 246th Volks Grenadier Division consisted of three Infantry Regiments, the 352nd, 404th and the 689th, a force of approximately 4000 to 5000 soldiers. These forces were located throughout the city. However, defensive responsibility placed the 404th Infantry Regiment in the north, the 352nd Infantry Regiment in the east, and the 689th Infantry Regiment in the south. To the



west of the city was the Siegfried Line known as the Westwall. In addition to these units, the 246th Volks Grenadier Division was augmented with a unit called Battlegroup "Rink", which was a replacement battalion. The 246th Volks Grenadier Division, with attached forces, never exceeded nine battalions.

The 246th was a unit comprised of men with varying levels of training and experience. Some soldiers were converted sailors or airmen who now filled the line as infantrymen. "The enemy forces consisted of roughly 5,000 men, five tanks, nineteen 105 mm howitzers, eight 75mm pieces and six 150mm guns". (13) These forces were primarily defensive units.

In preparing for the defense of the city of Aachen, Colonel Wilck and his staff analyzed the 1st Infantry Division's best avenue of approach into Aachen and their most likely course of action. They determined that the 1st Infantry Division would attack and the Division's main attack would be directed at the southern portion of Aachen. Consequently, the bulk of the 246th Volk Grenadier Division's strength and work efforts were to the southern portion of Aachen. This turned out to be an incorrect assessment of the direction of the attack and was a critical error in their defensive plan.

### OPENING MOVES

War is nothing but a duel on a larger scale.

Clausewitz: On war, 1832.

After days and weeks of fighting inch by inch through the Siegfried Line, the 1st Division was ready to take Aachen. On 10 October, the Americans offered the remaining Germans a surrender ultimatum. "The city of Aachen is now completely surrounded by American forces. If the city is not promptly and completely surrendered unconditionally, the American Army ground and Air Forces will proceed ruthlessly with air and artillery bombardment to reduce it to submission". (14) At this time, the internal defenses of Aachen consisted of the 689th Regiment, 352nd Regiment, DIENDL Battle Group, XIX GAF Fortress Battalion, and the 1043rd Battalion. All of them were suffering heavily from attrition. (15) The entire Division had only been recently activated and consisted of poor quality and poorly trained soldiers. They did have well-prepared defenses, however, and many of the leaders were skilled Wehrmacht officers. Considering the quality of the personnel, combat efficiency and morale were quite low. (16) Colonel Wilck had only five Mark IV tanks and thirty three artillery and anti-aircraft guns. (17)

As opposed to the German units, the men of the 1st Division were battle veterans with a sense of destiny. They felt that they were always selected for difficult jobs because they had always accomplished their mission. They knew Hitler had vowed to protect Aachen and knew that, if they could take it, it would be a significant victory for the U.S. Although esprit de corps was excellent, the men of the 1st Division were beginning to feel a little apprehensive about taking this very stubbornly defended city. Their rapid march across France and Belgium had spoiled them for the extensive resistance of the Siegfried Line. Casualties had not been too terribly high and their overall combat efficiency was excellent. (18)

The Germans did not accept the ultimatum and, when the offer expired 24 hours later on 11 October, the Americans employed massive air and artillery assets against the German positions. Four groups from IX Tactical Air Command, consisting of 300 P-38's and P-47's, opened the assault. Between 1100 hours and 1545 hours, the planes delivered more than sixty-two tons of bombs on the German positions. When the air strike ended, twelve battalions of VII Corps and 1st Division artillery took over, and, by 12 October, had delivered 169 tons of ground fired ordnance into Aachen. (19)

At the height of the bombardment, forty-eight Wehrmacht officers and men stumbled into a 26th Infantry outpost and surrendered. The Germans were so petrified by the intense

shelling and bombing that some of them verged on hysteria. "I've been in hell!" a young German noncommissioned officer screamed. (20) While this preparation was going on, the encircling Americans moved in.

The Germans made a violent counterattack and 10 battalions of artillery of the 1st and 30th Divisions and VII and XIX Corps were required to bring the counterattack under control. By 1930 hours, 11 October, the counterattack was driven back and the situation was under control. (21) During this initial assault of the city proper, American forces for the attack were limited. Most of the 1st Infantry Division units were disposed on an elongated front east and northeast of the city. This left only two Infantry battalions, the 2nd and 3rd Battalions of the 26th Infantry Regiment, available for the operation. (22)

The encirclement northeast of Aachen was incomplete at this stage, and the 26th Infantry Regiment Commander was ordered not to get inextricably engaged in the city. The attack frontage would be extremely wide, consequently; all companies had to be committed. Any reserve would have to come from the Division reserve battalion, although the encirclement had priority. (23)

Planning for this attack had actually begun around 2 October. Command and control called for a methodical reduction of every building. The troops were warned to overlook nothing, since every building would be considered an enemy stronghold until

proven otherwise. Each rifle company would have three tanks or tank destroyers, two 57-mm antitank guns, one flamethrower and two additional bazooka teams attached. The individual companies were assigned zones of action with a platoon-sized assault team assigned to a particular street. Each team would have one tank or tank destroyer and one heavy machine gun. Check points and contact points were designated at prominent buildings and street intersections. Advance would not be made past these points without proper coordination with adjacent units. Light artillery and mortars would be employed in close support to isolate the area under immediate attack. Targets were preplanned on suspect enemy locations and prominent terrain features. Centralized battalion ammunition dumps would be moved behind the advancing attackers to facilitate large ammunition expenditures. (24)

Intelligence gathering activities had been excellent. Maps of the city were available to the battalions as early as 6 October. Regular patrolling provided formulation of attack objectives by identifying strongpoints, anti-tank positions, observation posts, machine gun positions, and minefields. Prisoners taken by patrols indicated that German morale was low. (25)

In conjunction with the aerial and artillery bombardment on 11-12 October, the 3rd Battalion, 26th Infantry, 1st Infantry Division left one company on the left flank of the 2nd Battalion and moved to the west east to Rothe-Erde to capture the high

ground northeast of Aachen, and then to attack the factory district between that point and the city. On 12 October, one company of the 1st Battalion, which had been attached to 3rd Armored Division, was released back to 2nd Battalion and positioned to cover the southern approaches to the city. This released the initial 3rd Battalion company, which had been left on the left flank of 2nd battalion, to assist in the attack. The 3rd Battalion jumped off at 1100 hours on the 12th, took the high ground, and established a foothold in the factory district. They cleared most of their objective by the evening of 12 October. During this time, the 2nd Battalion moved forward to the railroad tracks on the southeast side of Aachen, clearing the built-up area with house-to-house fighting. Artillery was continually pounding the city. (26)

The 2nd Battalion was finally ready to enter the city proper. The railroad tracks marked the southern limits of the city and would be considered the line of departure (LD). The LD embankment was about 30 feet high on the west side of the Battalion sector and sloped to about 15 feet on the east side. The banks were fairly steep and would impose an obstacle to vehicles. There was one underpass in the Battalion zone, but this was blocked. The plan called for the 2nd Battalion to drive to the north and the 3rd Battalion to attack west with the two meeting on the north-east border of the city. The 2nd Battalion had all three rifle companies on line; "F", "E", "G", in order, east to west. (27)

The problem at that time was how to get the tanks, tank destroyers, and AT guns over the obstacle before the Germans could react. The tank platoon leader made a recon and finally found a place where several tanks could be taken over. The rest would have to wait until the underpass had been cleared. In the "Capture of Aachen", LTC Daniel relates the detailed planning for the attack. " use heavy air and artillery in early morning. Air will bomb anywhere in city except within 500 yards of the railroad tracks in 2nd Battalion zone. Artillery will stand on line 100 yards from the railroad tracks with light guns. Mediums and heavies will cover from 300-500 yards from the tracks. 2nd Battalion mortars will work the area from the tracks to the artillery line 100 yards beyond. Jump-off time was 0930, 13 October. All artillery would lift 200 yards and air will stop except for targets marked by colored smoke. Main problem was to get Infantry across exposed railroad embankment. Each Infantryman was given a hand grenade to throw over the embankment at 0930".

(28)

The main attack kicked off and E and F Companies scrambled over the embankment firing every weapon they had. The Germans were completely caught by surprise. They had expected the main attack to come from the south and not the east. Thus, the Americans advanced several blocks before encountering any resistance. As soon as the Germans got partially reorganized, they put up a fierce resistance and fought for every rubble heap.

Every position had to be stormed by the Americans using grenades, bayonets, rifle butts, and flame throwers. (29) F Company had been instructed to stay clear of the built-up area and head north until they reached their zone and then turn west. E Company was to clear all the buildings east of Adalbertsteinweg and north of the tracks. F Company found quite a built-up area in their zone northeast of the cemetery, and was slowed down considerably. By mid-afternoon, E and F companies still had not reached the line that was to allow G Company to be committed. An underpass was created by blowing out part of the walls of the station just to the west of the original underpass. Tanks were then driven through and by nightfall, 13 October, all the fighting vehicles were into the city. G company was also moved from its position along the embankment, so that all units were now in the city and ready for another push on 14 October. It had been determined by this time that daylight operations were absolutely necessary in street fighting to take full advantage of firepower and avoid loss of command and control. (30) Although the initial air strikes and artillery beginning on 11 October were significant in psychological effect, and mandatory to keep the Germans from roaming at will, it was later reported that, because of the thick-walled buildings and cellars, the bombardment did not materially speed up the capture of Aachen. (31)



## MAJOR PHASES OF THE BATTLE

War, like all other situations of danger and of change, calls forth the exertion of admirable intellectual qualities and great virtues.

William Cullen Bryant, 1794-1878

The Value and Uses of Poetry

The 2nd Battalion, 26th Infantry, under LTC Derrill M. Daniel, attacked again on 14 October to conduct a painstaking sweep through the city. In moving through the center of Aachen, the 2-26 Infantry had to plow through a maze of rubble and damaged buildings in their path. They also had to maintain contact with the 3-26 Infantry which was on the north striking northwestward through the industrial portion of Aachen, and then on to the west to seize the three hills which dominated Aachen from the north. The left flank of the 2-26 Infantry was located on the railroad, which gave the battalion a frontage of 2000 yards. This was no minor assignment in view of the density of the buildings. (32)

The fighting in the 2-26 Infantry sector quickly fell into a pattern of employing small assault teams. A tank destroyer

or tank was employed with each infantry platoon. This technique would keep each building under fire until the riflemen were able to move in to assault. The heavy firepower would then be shifted to the next house. Augmented by the battalions' light and heavy machineguns firing up the streets, this usually drove the Germans into the cellars where the infantrymen would storm them behind a barrage of hand grenades. Whenever the enemy proved particularly tenacious, the riflemen used the other weapons at their disposal, including demolitions and flamethrowers employed by two-man teams which were attached to each company headquarters. The men did not wait for actual targets to appear; each building, they assumed, would be a nest of resistance until proved otherwise. Light artillery and mortar fire swept forward block by block several streets ahead of the infantry, while the heavier artillery was used to destroy German communications farther to the rear. (33) The artillery was positioned south of Aachen, and with the attack being conducted from the east to west, it meant the artillery "sheaf" was parallel to the front line. Since the deflection probable error was insignificant, this allowed the artillery to fire very close to the infantry maneuver elements without danger of "short rounds". Range probable error was significant consideration, especially for the 155-mm "Long Tom" guns. This allowed the artillery to be fired as close as the same block in which the infantry was working. The employment of artillery with fuze-delay allowed the shells to penetrate one or more floors before exploding. The Germans simply could not stay in the buildings with artillery shells coming through the top and they

were no match for the machineguns when they took to the streets.  
(34)

To enhance command and control of the operation and maintain contact between the units, each day a series of check points was designated by the Battalion Commander. These checkpoints consisted of street intersections and the more prominent buildings. The unit SOP was that no unit would advance beyond a check point until after establishing contact with the adjacent unit. Each rifle company was assigned a specific zone of advance; company commanders, in turn, generally designated a street to each platoon. (35)

At about 1200 hours, 14 October, F Company reached the point where it was to contact the 3rd Battalion. However, they were not able to move forward since the 3rd Battalion to the north was not at the coordination point and it appeared the Germans were trying to outflank the Battalion. The Battalion was told to hold at that current position because of heavy fighting going on to the north. They were also told to be prepared to defend to the east in case of a German breakthrough. The lines held against the German penetration attempts. Later during the night of 14 October, the 3rd Battalion Commander personally checked the coordination points and ascertained that his southern left flank company was several blocks north of the correct junction point. He directed the company to move into the correct position early in the morning of 15 October. (36)

During the night of 14 and 15 October, the Germans made attempts to resupply the city by air drops. Two aircraft flew low over the city, dropping food, cigarettes, and leaflets with greetings and exhortations to the gallant defenders of the city. As in most air drops, accuracy was a real problem, resulting in many of the supplies falling into the hands of the Americans while the leaflets blew into the German lines. The Americans were quite appreciative of the cigarettes since they were in short supply. (37)

G Company uncovered a large pillbox or blockhouse. After driving the defenders inside and sealing the doors with machine gun fire, the Company Commander approached with an interpreter and demanded the surrender of the occupants. He got no reply, so he had a flame thrower brought up, and again demanded their surrender. When there was no reply, the Company Commander had a couple of squirts of flame placed on the baffles of the doors. There was immediate action inside, so the flame was stopped. A German captain came out to discuss the terms of surrender. He was told there would be no discussions, either he surrendered immediately, or he would get fried. The results were very positive, since over 200 soldiers and over 1000 civilians came out to surrender. Inspection of the "pillbox" revealed that it was a 3-story air raid shelter with walls 15 feet thick. The Battalion encountered 2 or 3 more of these shelters during the battle of Aachen. (38)

By late afternoon on the 15th, the Batttalion had reached the line shown on map 3. At dusk on the 15th, the Germans launched a counterattack against G Company. This attack came down Hindenburgstrasse and penetrated a couple of blocks down Zollenstrasse. After about two hours of fighting, the penetration was sealed off and the line was restored. The Battalion had lost one tank destroyer, an anti-tank gun, and one heavy machine gun. (39)

During 16 October the Battalion was again held up because of the critical battle going on to the east of the city. The Germans in the city were pleased and surprised that they were able to enjoy two days of grace. They were able to use these days to their advantage by bringing in long truck convoys at night with much needed supplies. These included 25 tons of ammunition for the garrisons depleted reserves. Additionally, this provided time for the SS units to break off contact with the Americans and move into the center of the town to support Colonel Wilck's defensive operations. This action was crucial to the ability of the Aachen garrison to continue the defense and resulted in the garrison being able to survive for two more weeks. (40)

The crucial gap was finally closed late on 16 October when patrols from the 30th Division made contact with the 18th Infantry, thus completely encircling Aachen. This was six days after the delivery of the ultimatum. (41)

Offensive operations in the city were halted until 17 October to allow for reinforcement of the extended left and right flanks of the 26th Infantry. (42)

During this halt, the 2-26th Infantry was able to make extensive use of the 155-mm SP gun that had been attached to the Battalion. At first, the employment was hampered by concerns that the important resource might be lost if it were moved forward and used in a direct fire role. However, in a direct fire mode, the fire of the 155-mm SP was "quite spectacular and satisfying", from the American viewpoint. However, Col Wilck's opinion was just the opposite and, after the capture of the city, he claimed that "the use of such a gun at such a close range was barbarous and should be outlawed". (43)

The 2-26th Infantry zone widened significantly as it crossed Wilhelm Strasse and the the enemy resistance became even more fanatical. On 17 October, the 1106th Engineers, who had been blocking the southern approaches to the city, moved a battalion northward to make contact with the 2nd Battalion. Additionally, a battalion of the 110th Infantry, 28th Infantry Division, was attached to the 1st Infantry division and employed in a flank security role between the engineers and the 2-26th Infantry. In the north, Task Force (TF) Hogan joined the attack along the right flank of the 3-26 Infantry. Composed of two battalions of mixed armor and mechanized infantry from the 3rd Armored

Division, TF Hogan was give the mission of assisting in the capture of Lousberg Heights and cutting the Aachen-Laurensberg highway. This reinforcement gave the Americans a force roughly equal to the defenders. (44)

Offensive activities resumed on the morning of 18 October with the clearing forces continuing to learn as the attack progressed. Several bitter experiences in which Germans were bypassed in cellars and other hiding places reminded the attackers of the necessity to search thoroughly. That same morning, one company was delayed over two hours while it searched for a source of small arms fire behind the lines. The source was finally located in a church steeple upon which tank and tank destroyer fires were ineffective. The 155-mm gun was used to demolish the steeple, which proved to be an observation post made of heavy concrete. Both the 2nd and 3rd Battalions found the 155-mm gun to be very effective, but limited quantities of ammunition restricted its use to very difficult situations. (45)

By nightfall on the 19th, the 2-26 Infantry had captured the cathedral and the lines were as shown on map 3. (46)

In the north, the 3rd Battalion reduced the remaining resistance on Observatory Hill, capturing the Hotel Quellenhof, a large food and ammunition cache, and a 20-mm anti-aircraft gun. On 19 October, the battalion seized the Falvorsbery objective against token resistance. At the same time, TF Hogan was beginning

to overrun the poorly defended Lousberg Heights. (47)

Despite American gains, the Aachen Commander was ordered to "hold the city to the last man and if necessary, allow himself to be buried under its ruins". On 19 October, however, the higher German commanders pulled the counterattacking divisions out of the encirclement area and abandoned the defenders to their fate. Colonel Wilck issued an order demanding a fight to the last man and the last bullet, but the order did little to delay the end of the rapidly crumbling resistance. (48)

On the morning of 21 October, members of the 3rd Battalion brought their 155-mm gun forward to attack a large air raid bunker. The bunker proved to be the headquarters of the German defense, and the German Commander was eager to surrender before the gun was employed. Resistance was ended at 1205 hours on 21 October. (49)



### KEY EVENTS

...the ruin, the disgrace, the woe of war.

Shelly: Queen Mab. iu, 1813.

The Battle of Aachen had several key events that dictated the course of the battle. On 10 October, with Aachen approximately 60 percent encircled, the 1st U.S. Army Commander sent a messenger into the city, under a white flag, giving the German Garrison Commander the opportunity to surrender. The Germans were provided with 24 hours in which to make their decision. No formal reply was ever returned, so at 1200 hours on 11 October, the formal assault of the city began with artillery shelling and bombing attacks by the Army Air Corps. Refusal to surrender initiated the methodical process of reducing the city and was the beginning of its eventual collapse.

In retrospect, the German Commander had little choice in deciding whether or not to surrender. The city of Aachen had great significance to the Germans. It was the first German city to be threatened by the Allied forces during World War II. Hitler and his Third Reich propaganda machinery expected nothing less than a strong defense. Surrender was out of the question. In fact, in an effort to alleviate any temptation a commander may

have had to surrender, Hitler required fortress commanders to sign an oath never to surrender. To do so subjected the commander's family to death by execution.

Another significant event occurred on 14 and 15 October that prolonged the Battle of Aachen. The Germans conducted a counterattack against the 3rd Battalion, 26th Infantry Regiment on 15 October. This counterattack was made possible by the receipt of reinforcements and supplies. "During the period 14-15 October, the Germans used the gap northeast of the city to reinforce with a convoy of eight assault guns and one infantry battalion. Late in the afternoon of 15 October, the German garrison employed these troops in a battalion-sized counterattack against two companies of the 3rd Battalion." (50) After bitter fighting that included hand to hand combat, the 3rd Battalion, 26th Infantry Regiment was able to repulse the attack. Once the counterattack was turned back, the process of clearing the city was continued.

External to the fighting in the city, another counterattack by elements of two German divisions had direct impact on the capture of the city. "The commitment of the two German Panzer Divisions against the encircling forces east of the city, however temporarily, halted the clearing effort. Both battalions were ordered to cease offensive operations and to be prepared to defend to their rear. Both were given on-order missions to reinforce the units west of the city. The German

attack was stopped and the gap successfully closed late on 16 October, but the offensive operations within the city were delayed until 18 October".(51) The significance of this counterattack was twofold. First, it prolonged the clearing operations by the 26th Infantry Regiment in the city. Allied offensive operations weren't able to resume until 18 October, a delay of two days. Second, by repulsing the German counterattack, the 1st Infantry Division was able to linkup with the 30 Infantry Division, thus completely encircling the city. This occurred at 1615 hours, 16 October. Encirclement of Aachen completely severed all ground lines of communications that the 246th Volks Grenadier Division had had with its higher headquarters. The only link that the 246th had with the outside world was via radio. The Germans tried to airdrop supplies to the encircled Division, but were unsuccessful. Most of the supplies that were dropped, landed in Allied controlled areas. The fate of the 246th Volks Grenadier Division and the city of Aachen were sealed at this point. However, "despite American gains, the Aachen commander was ordered to 'hold the city to the last man and, if necessary, allow himself to be buried under its ruins'". (52)

The German high command insured 1st Infantry Division success on 19 October when they "pulled the counterattacking divisions out of the encirclement area and abandoned the defenders to their fate". (53) From this point on, the capture of Aachen entailed the methodical process of clearing the city house by house, block by block, until the Germans either were all

killed, captured or surrendered. Colonel Wilck and his garrison held on until 21 October, when, at 1205 hours, he finally surrendered.

Analysis of the battle indicates that the First U.S. Army Commander initially incorrectly assessed the enemy forces in the Aachen area and their ability to tie down the 1st Infantry Division. Consequently, it was necessary for him to change his plans and capture the city of Aachen. These new orders initially presented problems for the attacking division, the 1st Infantry Division, due to its extended line. No forces were readily available to attack the city. The VII Corps Commander eased this burden by providing the 1106th Engineer Combat Group, used in an infantry mode, to fill the line south of Aachen. This freed the 2nd Battalion and 3rd Battalion, 26th Infantry Regiment to make the attack of the city.

The German Commander of the 246th Volks Grenadier Division also incorrectly assessed the direction from which the 1st Infantry Division would attack. By doing so, he positioned the strength of forces in the south of the city. The attack by the 2nd and 3rd Battalions, 26th Infantry Regiment was in the east of Aachen. Even after their initial attack, Colonel Wilck failed to accept the attack in the east as the main attack. By the time the Germans realized that their main threat was not from the south, the 1st Infantry Division had made great gains.

### THE OUTCOME

War kills men, and men deplore the loss;  
but war also crushes bad principle and  
tyrants, and so saves societies.

C.C. Colton: Lacon, 1820.

The Battle for Aachen was over and the U.S. Army had achieved a clear tactical victory. Though the Germans had failed to prevent encirclement of the city, and had only been able to hold out for only five days after the encirclement, they believed they had imposed a telling, though costly, delay. The impact on the American plans can be seen in the fact that General Hodges had planned on the 1st U.S. Army being at the Rhine River by October 1st. Now the assault on the Rhine would be delayed indefinitely.

There were many factors involved in the U.S. victory. However, it was not due to a significant difference in personnel strength. In fact, the Germans held a small edge in personnel until the actual encirclement was completed.

The U.S. forces were well organized. The 1st Infantry Division had gained much notoriety from World War I and the North African Campaign. The 1st Division's code name was "Danger"- a word which appropriately described a unit with such history and lived up to the motto: "No mission too difficult! No sacrifice

too great ! Duty first" . Danger had been with the Division since North Africa in 1942 and, with the Siegfried Line and Aachen looming ahead, even the greenest troops who had yet to face battle raced ahead without doubts or qualms.

The decision to isolate the city at the outset gave the 1st U.S Army a great deal of flexibility. Once the city was isolated, they would be able to bypass or reduce the city at will. If the encirclement had been accomplished with a minimum of forces, then the city could have been bypassed and the drive to the Rhine started. However, heavy resistance required substantial forces to conduct the isolation, which restricted the number of forces available to conduct the bypass operation. Encirclement gave the U.S. Forces the ability to accomplish tactical surprise in gaining a foothold for destruction. The defenders expected an attack from the south and were not able to reposition forces in a timely manner to respond to an attack from the east. The attackers could have entered the city from any direction. We believe that the success of this operation was due to the fact that the enemy had expected the Division to attack Aachen prior to the attack on the Siegfried Line; therefore most of the defenses in the city were concentrated to the south. After fixing the defenders with artillery, mortars, and aerial bombardment, the enemy flank was turned from the east and north from a position which they least expected the attack to come.

Attacking elements of the 26th Infantry were tailored for fighting in urban areas. Platoon-sized assault elements cleared their assigned streets effectively. Attachments of tanks and

anti-tank weapons at company and platoon level proved to be essential. Flamethrower and bazooka teams were also effective. Problems with rubble in the streets could have been overcome by the attachment of Engineer elements to company or platoon level, but the overall organization must be considered effective.

The attacking units used methodical, house-to-house clearing techniques. Problems with enemy use of the sewers were quickly overcome. The attackers foresaw the requirement for increased firepower and large expenditures of ammunition. Accordingly, firepower at company and platoon level was supplemented, and consolidated ammo dumps were moved forward as the attackers moved. Checkpoint and contact points were established at easily identifiable locations to facilitate control. Wide zones of action were undesirable but unavoidable because of restrained numbers of forces. The attackers quickly learned that both men and equipment should avoid streets where possible. The use of effective clearing techniques gave the Americans a definite advantage.

Liberal use of fire support gave the attackers a great advantage. The massive air and artillery bombardment significantly reduced both the German ability and will to resist. Artillery direct support units were positioned so that "short" rounds were not a problem for the friendly ground troops. Delay fuzes allowed rounds to penetrate buildings before exploding. Self-propelled artillery was used in the direct fire role with great success.

The intelligence effort was started early and exploited

fully. Weapons location, fortified positions, observation posts, obstacles, and strong points were located, and the information was incorporated into the scheme of maneuver. Intelligence provided by patrols was invaluable. Maps of the city were distributed early, thus giving the attackers the advantage of knowing the location of the buildings and streets.

The weapons and equipment with which the Americans fought the Battle of Aachen might have needed some repair, and in some cases, replacement after the wear and tear of Normandy and the pursuit across France, but, in general, the equipment was better than the Germans had.

The basic shoulder weapon for the U.S. Army was the semi-automatic .30 caliber M1 Garrand rifle, which was admired by its users. The basic shoulder weapon for the German Army was the 7.92-mm Mauser bolt-action rifle, similar in design to the '03 Springfield. Two favorite weapons of the American's were the .30 caliber Browning automatic Rifle (BAR) and the .30 caliber Browning Machine Gun. The most effective close range anti-tank weapons were, on the German side, a one-shot, shaped charge piece called a panzerfaust; and on the American side, a 2.36 inch rocket launcher, the bazooka. Even though German and U.S. artillery was of singular caliber and quality, the excellent American fire direction procedures and ammunition permitted more accurate fire and greater concentration in a shorter time.

To offset the defender's advantage through knowledge of terrain, the Americans made intensive use of aerial photographs and artillery spotter planes while the Germans couldn't take



advantage of similiar assets.

The entire German division defending the city of Aachen had only recently been activated and consisted of cripples, old men, wounded, navy and air unit personnel. Training was basically non-existent since they only expected to fight from well fortified positions. The American units were very well trained, had been on the march conducting assult and attacks for several months, and had confidence in their combat abilities. In preparation for the MOUT assault, additional planning and training, incorporated with command and control procedures, were established. Leadership was fairly good in both units. The Germans had many skilled Wehrmacht officers, but the Americans had the edge since they had many skilled , battle-hardened NCO's. Morale and unit cohesion was much better in the American units than in the German units because the Americans had been fighting together for a considerable period, had completed several successful campaigns, and knew they always accomplished the mission. As stated, the Germans had little unit cohesion because they had just recently activated. Morale was a key factor in the German forces because they were aware of the strategic and tactical situation and had been left to fight to their death. Casualties and prisoners rates were fairly high in the German units. Another main contributing morale factor was the presence and attitude of the German SS units and soldiers. Internal trouble and dissension were rampant between the two groups. The SS troops had so angered the Wehrmacht that many confrontations had taken place. In one instance, "nineteen Wehrmacht officers

and enlisted men had been executed by an SS firing squad in an Aachen public square because they had protested against elite Corps arrogance and brutality".(54) There were great bitterness and problems between the groups until the capture of Aachen.

Initially, the intention of the 1st Army Commander "was to encircle and by pass the city, leaving behind enough troops to face eventual capitulation". (55) However, German resistance necessitated a change to his plans. The 1st Infantry Division was ordered to seize the city. Once given this mission, the 1st Division set about planning and preparing for the capture of the city. The scheme of maneuver was to attack from the east with two battalions of the 26th Infantry Regiment. It would have to be stated, even though the fighting was intense, that once the First Army Commander altered his plans and tasked the 1st Infantry Division with the mission of seizing the city of Aachen, the Commander's plans and his intent were fulfilled.

On the the other hand, the Germans saw the battle fought against their desires and intent. The initial problem that the 246th Volks Grenadier Division encountered was the 1st Infantry Division's main attack from the east. Colonel Wilck had prepared and positioned his forces in the south of Aachen in what he thought would be the direction of attack. Even after the initial assault by the 26th Infantry Regiment, the Germans failed to believe and respond to the U.S. thrust. This allowed the U.S. forces to advance against lighter resistance than the Germans could have provided. By the time the Germans maneuvered to counter the attack, it was too late.

Shortages of supplies, ammunition, and anti-tank weapons reduced the German capabilities and their ability to respond. Additionally, once encircled, the 246th was sealed off from resupply, except for a few fruitless attempts to parachute supplies to the Division. This lack of supplies, and particularly ammunition, denied Colonel Wilck the ability to adequately respond to the U.S. attack.

Evacuation of wounded personnel for the 1st Infantry Division presented those problems typical of an attacking force. Procedures for removal of wounded primarily was by medical vehicles to rear area aid stations. However, the German forces boxed in the city faced more severe problems. In Colonel Wilck's interrogation briefing, he stated that the last evacuation of wounded occurred on 15 October. After that date all wounded remained in the city and treatment was limited due to shortages of medical supplies. (56)

There is no yardstick to measure the effectiveness of U.S. medical procedures. However, of the two battalions tasked with seizing Aachen, "498 casualties were incurred. Of these 498, 75 were killed and nine were missing". (57)

The Germans lost much greater numbers of soldiers and civilians. There is no way to determine the number of additional fatalities, due to lack of evacuation after 15 October. But it is prudent to assume that because of their inability to evacuate their wounded, greater numbers of deaths resulted.

Prisoner evacuation was a key source of intelligence. During the battle, approximately 250 to 300 German prisoners were

taken daily. These prisoners were evacuated via normal channels to the rear where they were interrogated. 1st Division was aided in the interrogation process by a "POW interrogation team of one officer and three enlisted men from 'T' force, which had been scheduled for Cologne, but was attached to the 1st Division CIC Detachment, and was employed in Aachen to screen civilians. Division and First Army Order of Battle teams, and an officer of Strategic Service Team from 12th Army Group, assisted the CIC Detachment in searching for enemy documents." (58)

The Battle of Aachen was a costly battle for both sides, but especially for the Germans and the city of Aachen. Including the preceeding events leading up to the 10 October attack of the city, "American casualties numbered approximately 6,000; 498 of these were incurred by the two Battalions of the 26th Infantry. Of the 498, 75 were killed and nine were missing".(59) Most of Wilck's original five thousand man garrison had been killed, wounded or captured." (60) The city of Aachen was almost completely destroyed,...nearly 80% of the remaining houses in Aachen had been destroyed or badly damaged". (61)

The 1st U.S. Army's tactics and techniques in the elimination of Aachen as an obstacle to the advance to the Rhine must be considered appropriate and successful. The attackers surrounded the city, giving themselves the option to bypass or reduce. When stubborn German resistance made the bypass untenable, the Americans achieved tactical surprise in the conduct of an effective operation. Organization for combat was appropriate, and effective clearing techniques were used. Fire

support was applied liberally, and intelligence efforts minimized German advantages. Weak points in the plan were the timing of the reduction and failure to employ a reserve properly. These factors, combined with an overwhelming advantage in leadership, training, unit morale and cohesion, allowed the Americans to conduct an effective and efficient operation.

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## CHAPTER 5

# **Significance of The Action**

You cannot qualify war in harsher terms than I will. War is cruelty, and you cannot refine it.

W.T. Sherman: Letter to the Mayor  
of Atlanta, 12 September 1864.

Most wars, battles, campaigns, police actions and even skirmishes have identifiable and quantifiable immediate and long-term significance, if one takes the time and exerts the effort to carefully evaluate the details of the action. The Battle of Aachen is one of those battles that had clearly discernible significance which had immediate and long-term impacts on the outcome of the war, the military and psychological capabilities of the opposing forces, and the overall future of the nations involved.

Any action, whether a success or failure, also has one or more "lessons learned". Some lessons are obvious and others are only visible following an in-depth analysis and evaluation. The Battle of Aachen resulted in "lessons learned" from both categories for the American and German forces and nations.

### IMMEDIATE (SHORT-TERM) SIGNIFICANCE

War makes the victor stupid and the  
vanquished vengeful.

F.W. Nietzsche: Human All-Too-  
Human, I, 1878.

The Battle of Aachen was decisive because Aachen was the first major German city to be attacked and conquered by Allied forces. (1) Hitler had personally assured the German population that Aachen would not fall to American/Allied hands. (2) The capture of the city of Aachen was imperative if the Americans hoped to penetrate the "invincible" Siegfried Line (Westwall) of which the Aachen region was a strategic portion. (3)

American forces were securely implanted on "sacred German soil" and had a clear, but still rugged, road across the German Fatherland, to the Rhine River, and onward to Berlin. The German military forces and civilian population were psychologically defeated as a result of the destruction and capture of Aachen. The German high-command made a deliberate decision to not prepare the German population for such a defeat, possibly out of an over-optimistic faith in the strength and determination of the capabilities of the German military, or perhaps in an effort to actually re-instill a winning faith in their military and civilian peoples. (4)

The opposing forces, both American and German, lost significant numbers of killed or wounded, and the Germans had a substantial number of the Wehrmacht, and to a lesser extent the SS and other armed supports, taken prisoner. In Aachen itself, many civilians were brought under U.S. Army control. In the Aachen region, many civilians succumbed easily to the American forces, while others fought with small arms or words as the American troops captured the city of Aachen and the surrounding areas. (5)

First and foremost, the Americans, as a result of the Battle of Aachen, decisively and strategically crossed the hitherto denied German border, captured the first major German city, penetrated the falsely portrayed, impregnable Siegfried Line, and were then in the strategic position to exploit their successes and continue the battle through Germany to its strategic capital city of Berlin. The American success at Aachen motivated American military forces, who saw, for the first time, that success, and an end to the dreaded World War II, was within reach, and theirs for the taking. The American people were also encouraged and motivated to continue their undying support, both material and moral, for the fighting American troops.

The Battle of Aachen provided a significant advantage to the winning American forces. The advantages were most clearly seen in the following:

- Increased morale and determination of the American combat and support troops.

- The demoralization of the German forces and civilian population.

- The pseudo invincibility of the Siegfried Line.

- The pseudo invincibility of Hitler and his high-command and their stated objectives.

The Battle of Aachen provided a significant disadvantage to the losing German forces and people. The most significant disadvantages were:

- Germans finally realized that their war, on behalf of the "master race", was coming to its ultimate downfall and that their country was wide open to the American conqueror. Despite the loss of Aachen, the Nazi propaganda machine attempted to report on "our furious, uncompromising determination to give up not a foot of our land without a fight". For a fascinating glimpse into the Nazi propaganda machine, see the 26 October 1944 article by Kurt Neher in Deutsch Allgemeine Zeitung at Appendix A.

- Hitler, in conscripting the Volksstrum, 15-18 year old

boys and 50-60 year old men to join the fighting at the Front, had severely hampered, and even crippled, German arms production where many of them had been previously employed. Some arms plants' production came to a near standstill because there workers were charged to become part of the Volksstrum. (6) "What Allied bombers had failed to accomplish, Hitler did with a stroke of his pen." (7) In fact, in the final stages of Aachen, many of the terrified, poorly trained Volksstrumers were quick to rip off their arm bands, throw away their weapons and flee to the Americans. (8)

#### LONG-TERM SIGNIFICANCE

The success of war is gauged by the amount of damage it does.

Victor Hugo: Ninety-three 1879

The outcome of the Battle of Aachen had long-term significance on the German forces and on the German nation itself. The German Wehrmacht and SS, although they experienced or saw defeat during July and August of 1944 in France and Belgium, had their strength and capability to withstand the American onslaught renewed by Hitler and his high command staff and commanders. That false renewal was accomplished by threatening to harm the families of the Wehrmacht should they not fight to their fullest to repel the attacking American force, or should they in anyway indicate that the Nazi purpose was wrong or weakening. The



result was a permanent alienation of previously devoted supporters. (9) The industrial support mechanism for the German military was permanently weakened by Hitler's establishment of the Volkssturm, which was designed to supplement the forces defending the Aachen region and the Siegfried Line. The Nazi industrial machine was further decimated after General Eisenhower broadcast an appeal, during the fighting for control of Aachen and the Siegfried Line, to the 8 million slave laborers in Germany on 2 October 1944. He asked them to leave the factories and join organized cells of foreign workers. Although the slave laborers did not walk away from the military production factories in mass, they did cause permanent damage to German industry by causing machinery breakdowns which slowed munitions production, damaging critical parts in various plants and mysteriously breaking tools, manufacturing artillery shells which proved to be duds when fired at the Front, and destroying or damaging factory buildings and equipment by fire all over Germany. (10) Immediately following Eisenhower's broadcast plea to the slave laborers, the Germans feared reprisals and uprisings and finally, for the first time, begin issuing good food and decent clothing to the slave workers. Evidently, the German's kindness came years too late because the workers rallied individually and in groups to cause long-term damage to the Nazi war machine. (11)

Although the Battle of Aachen lasted for only a little over a month, it demonstrated American/Allied strength and determination and proved to the German people that their Fuehrer

was fallible. The Battle of Aachen ranks only second to the Normandy Invasion as the beginning of the end of World War II in Europe.

#### MILITARY "LESSONS LEARNED" FROM THE BATTLE OF AACHEN

War is a dreadful thing, and unjust war is a crime against humanity. But it is such a crime because it is unjust, not because it is war.

Theodore Roosevelt: Speech at the Sorbonne, 23 April 1910.

Perhaps the most significant lesson learned from the Battle of Aachen, and certainly other battles, is the value of demoralizing the enemy in their own eyes and in the eyes of their supporters. At Aachen, the Americans were able to accomplish that demoralization by challenging Hitler's words and deeds and proving him no longer capable of withstanding the American/Allied quest for victory.

Most of the lessons learned at Aachen deal directly with Military Operations on Urbanized Terrain (MOUT):

● Once surrounded, any size city can be reduced at the pleasure of the attacker.

● Surprise is essential to any assault. Certainly surprise as a Principle of War is not a new lesson learned, but the American Forces learned at Aachen that in a MOUT action surprise is just as important as it is on a conventional battlefield.

● In attacking a large city, assaulting troops must clear the enemy from each building before proceeding to the next. The successful attacker cannot afford to bypass an enemy position. Each building is a separate and distinct objective.

● Artillery must be positioned to fire parallel to the front of assaulting troops to permit close fire support in towns.

● Assaulting troops must keep out of the streets as much as possible. They must go from building to building, blasting holes if necessary.

● Daylight operations in street fighting are necessary to take full advantage of maximum fire power and to avoid loss of control.

● Attacking troops and their supporting weapons must maintain a continuous stream of fire from all available weapons every time a forward movement is made.

● Stealth is of little value when your enemy is in the next room or even in the next building. (12)

The 1106th Engineer Combat Group had their own series of lessons learned during the MOUT action in Aachen. Since they were used in a non-traditional combat role, they recognized the following lessons:

● Deliberate planning is required when deviating from their primary role/mission.

● A reorganization is required to meet the command and control demands of the new combat mission.

● Support weapons are required, i.e., mortars and anti-tank guns.

● Time is required to link-up with artillery and mortar liaison officers.

● An overlap period of 24 hours is required by the officers and NCO's of the combat unit being replaced and the non-combat, engineer unit replacing it to insure maximum coordination.

● Every effort must be taken to avoid enemy identification of the Engineer unit. (13)

An all-important segment of any military operation is the logistical support of that action. In the Aachen Battle, that lesson was once again re-learned. The American combat forces had advanced so rapidly that supplies were two or three days behind the forward units. The U.S. armor and infantry units were forced to halt at the Siegfried Line because forward elements were out of Class I, III, V and VIII supplies (14) The Battle of Aachen reinforced another important lesson - the need to anticipate future actions and to pre-position supplies required for those actions. Years before the 1944 Battle of Aachen, Hitler had ordered tons of ammunition to be buried in the concrete vaults around Aachen as though he foresaw that one day he might have to protect the Fatherland from that strategic location. It was those millions of bullets, thousands of artillery shells, and tremendous stocks of hand grenades that were available to the German defenders that resulted in such a long, bloody battle. (15)

All of the lessons learned from any battle could, and usually do, have application to contemporary military operations. The lessons from Aachen are no exception, especially those MOUT lessons.

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## **Appendix A**



## The Defense of Aachen, City of the Emperors

Translated and digested at the Command and General Staff School from a German article by Kurt Neher in *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* 26 October 1944.

SINCE the 3d of October when an American loudspeaker before the German positions in the southwestern portion of Aachen demanded the surrender of the grenadiers and announced in a brazen lie, "Aachen is surrounded," bitter weeks have passed for the Americans. They have been weeks of wild, raging battles such as these intruders never before experienced on European soil. During these days, the dream of a bloodless conquest of Germany vanished for our enemies. Three American infantry divisions and two armored divisions struggled at the cost of the heaviest

casualties in this meter-by-meter warfare for this first bulwark in front of the German western fortifications. The price they paid, only to be forced to abandon the hope of attaining great operational objectives, was so heavy that the prospect of another winter of war, according to their own statement, came as a shock to them.

During these weeks, Germany, after the collapse of the French front, gained the urgently needed time to make preparations for defense against the enemy. Positions of great depth were constructed which make

### FOREIGN MILITARY DIGESTS

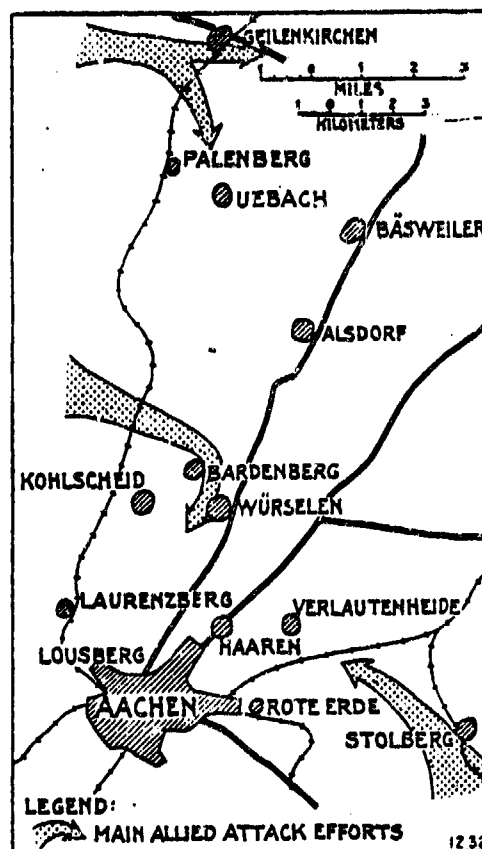
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every little village west of the Rhine a new Aachen. The hard labor by which millions of cubic meters of earth were removed was performed without direct pressure by the enemy. Thereby, the tragedy of the battle and loss of the City of the Emperors receives an heroic significance which serves as an end to its thousand years of existence, but it will continue to live in the history of the Reich, deathless and indestructible along with the heroic bravery of the men who defended it.

After the beginning of the great American offensive on 2 October, the struggle for the city was carried on in three phases. After a breakthrough by the American 7th Army Corps toward the west in the Stolberg area (see sketch) had failed in the face of the German defense, the American divisions of the 19th Corps began a new thrust over a broad front north of Aachen. From 2 to 7 October, the battle raged in the vicinity of Geilenkirchen. After heavy, bloody losses, the Americans had to content themselves with the line Palenberg-Uebach-Bäsweiler which extended south of Geilenkirchen. The rising curve of the tanks destroyed, which on 4 October amounted to fifteen Shermans, on 5 October had already risen to twenty-two, and on 6 October had reached the figure of forty-five, is the clearest proof of the fury with which the German defense met the American attack. The successes of the enemy were wholly out of proportion to his losses, at the cost of which he purchased these meter-by-meter advances. Step by step, the attacker was forced to bleed his way forward.

There is no question but that the resistance of the tank grenadiers and People's Grenadiers in the positions around Geilenkirchen forced the enemy to abandon his plans for a breakthrough. After 8 October, which introduced the second phase in the battle for the City of the Emperors, it became clear that the Americans were making an effort to encircle Aachen in a large pincer movement. And now followed a second attempt in a narrower area with still greater massing of all available forces. The Americans now plunged southward, from the north along

the west fortifications, through Alsdorf, Barndenberg, and Kohlscheid toward Aachen. At the same time they pushed westward from east of Aachen, through Verlautenheide and Haaren toward the eastern edge of the city. After this thrust from the vicinity of Stolberg and after the breaking up of his attack outside Geilenkirchen, the intention of the



enemy to encircle the city became clear as day. The battle for the village of Verlautenheide, which often changed hands several times in a single day, became more and more bitter. At 1050 on 10 October, the commandant of Aachen was ordered by the Americans to surrender the city within twenty-four hours. The demand by the Americans to surrender a German city without fighting was

refused. Aachen was not yet surrounded by the enemy. All necessary transport was still reaching the city over the highway from Würselen, although on 11 October the enemy had already effected a deep penetration for the first time, in the southeast, at the Rote Erde railway station. At 1745 the next day, he was thrown out.

With the approach to the eastern edge of Aachen, which had been paid for dearly by losses of tanks and infantry, and the approach of the enemy from the north, the third and last phase of the fighting began for the brave defenders under the hail of the area bombing and the hurricane of the artillery fire. In the constantly changing enemy attack, which by means of an armored division often squeezed the life line of the advanced strongpoint down to a width of a few hundred meters, the ground supply route was finally broken on 14 October. From now on, the Luftwaffe took over the supply mission.

The 13th of October was again a hard, difficult day for the men of Aachen, but one which they went through by dint of superior grit while the Americans looked forward to being in possession of the city in a matter of a few hours only.

And so it went, day after day. Time and again the grenadiers issued from cellars and from behind ruins to attack the Americans. They mopped up streets and squares, broke into the enemy strongpoints, and interfered with the enemy transport. The Americans were terrified by this kind of fighting, which appears unfair to them with their "never retreat" policy, as it costs them dearly. It is

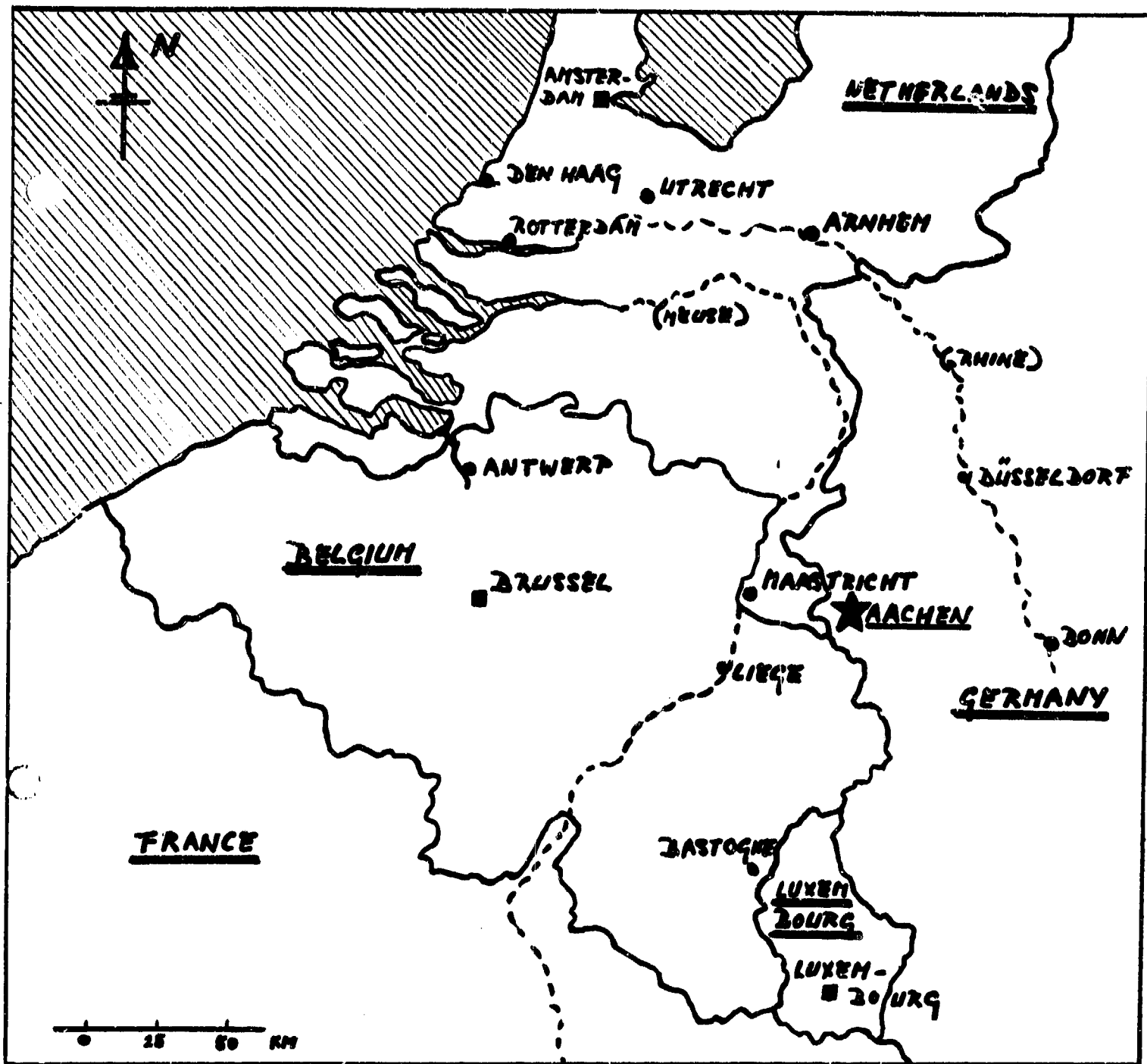
possible that our "never retreat" adversaries were members of that American 29th Infantry Division which allegedly has assumed the tradition of the "Maryland Blue and Gray Division" from the last World War.

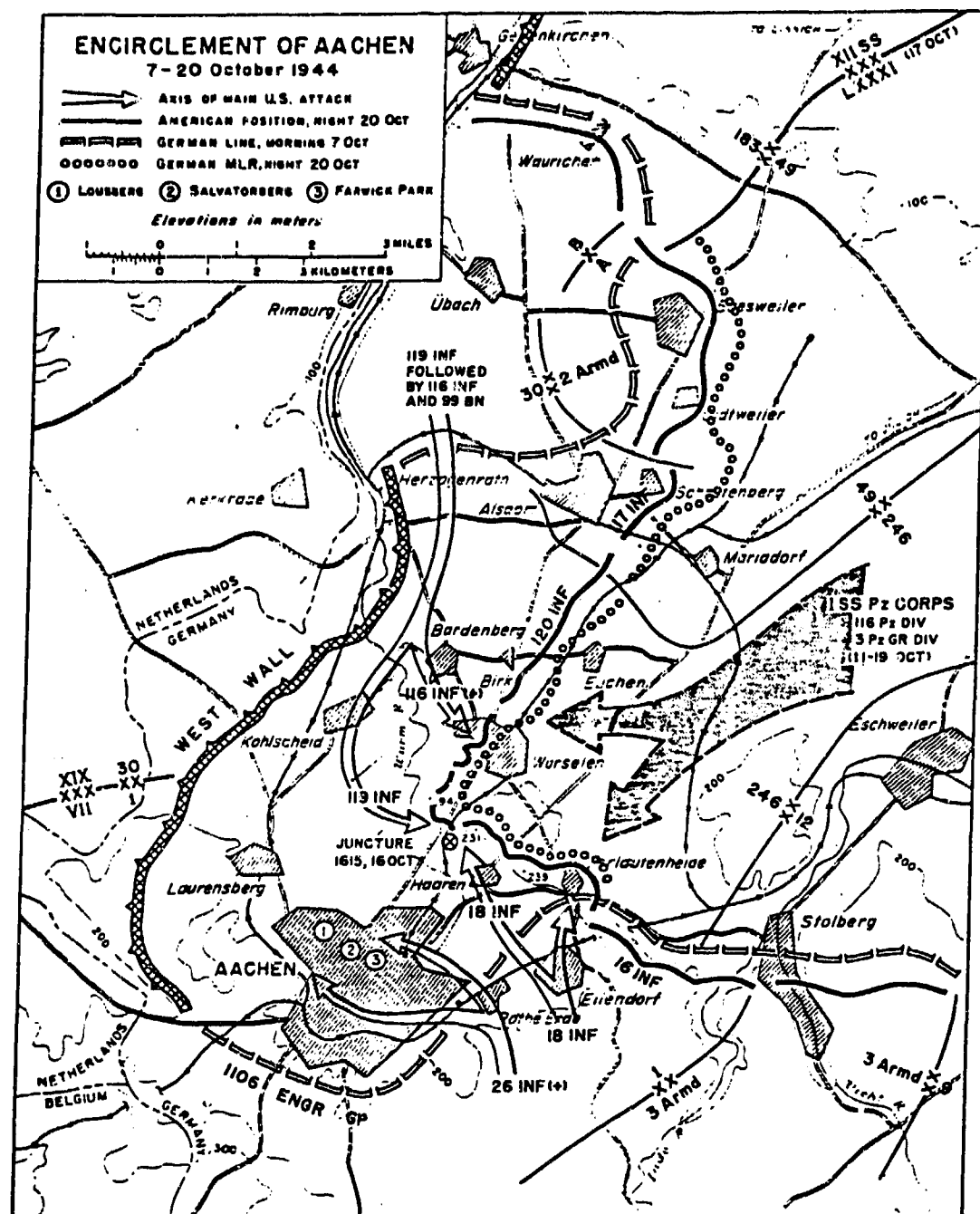
In the southern part of Würselen on 15 October, the Americans, simultaneously with German counterattacks in the center, were hurled back 600 meters to the northwest. Not till 18 October were the Americans, who had penetrated into the city from all sides, in a position to carry out a concentric attack on the heart of the city. The fight raged for hours with cold steel for the positions of Laurenzberg, till Colonel Wilck gave the order to occupy new positions on the Eousberg heights. The position of the heroic garrison had become smaller and smaller. It had been almost impossible for the supply planes during the last few days to find the tiny place at night where they were to drop their precious loads. The surrounded grenadiers lacked the proper means for marking the place for dropping the supplies since, with the least gleam of light, a murderous fire by the enemy started.

But they were still holding out on 19 and 20 October.

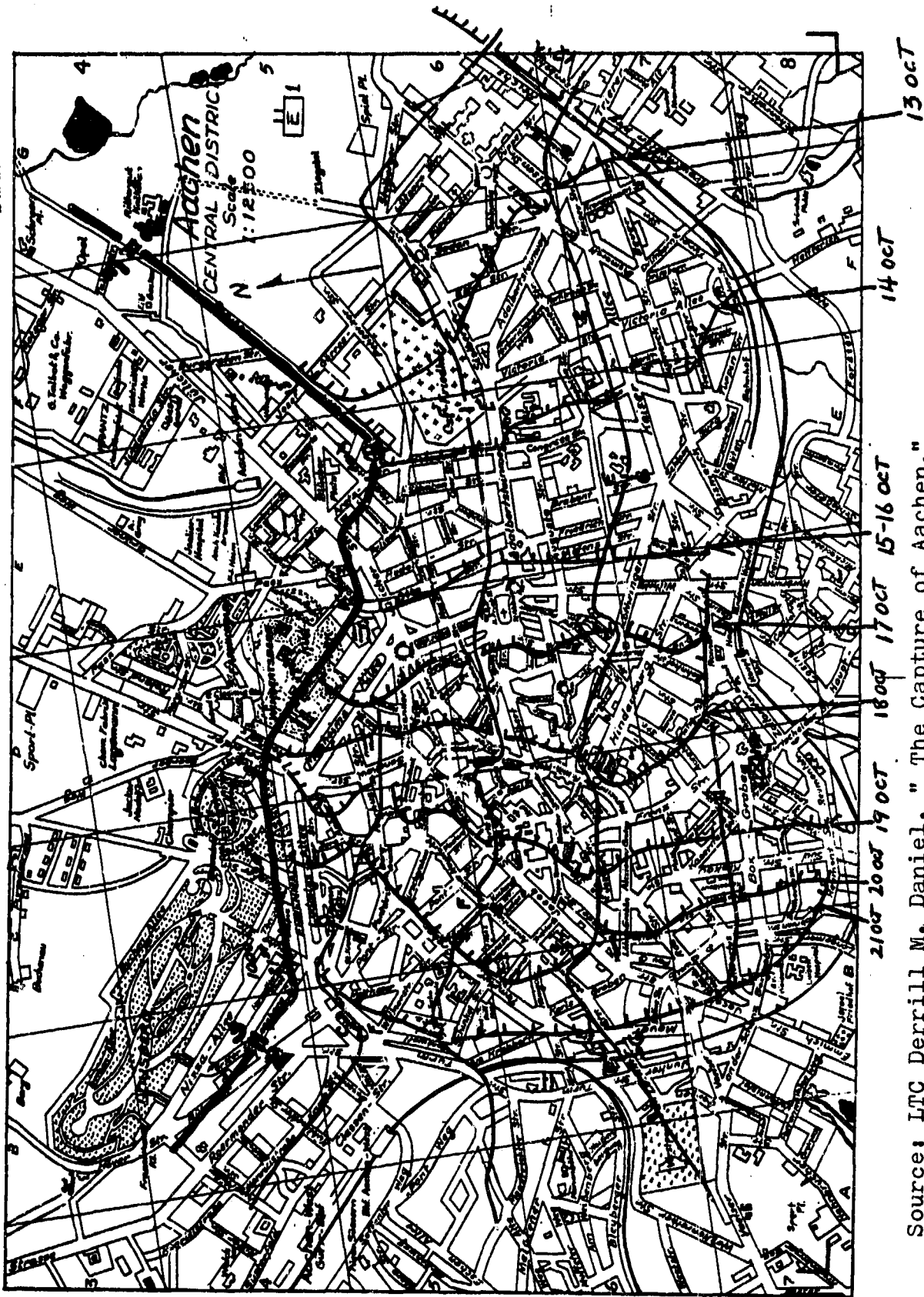
The burning City of the Emperors is a symbol of our furious, uncompromising determination to give up not a foot of our land without a fight. The loss of Aachen was hard and bitter enough for us. But it had to be. There was to be no uncertainty on the part of the enemy or on our part. Both for him and for us it was destined to become a gleaming beacon fire signifying that German soil shall be paid for only in blood.

## **Appendix B**





Source: Charles B. MacDonald, United States Army in World War II, The European Theater of Operations, The Siegfried Line Campaign, (Washington, D. C. : Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, 1963), p. 282.



Source: LTC Derrill M. Daniel, "The Capture of Aachen,"

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